



**Young, female and looking to the future: Exploring the
aspirations of adolescent girls in regional Tasmania**

by

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the aspirations of adolescent girls living in rural and remote areas of the Cradle Coast region of Tasmania. Based on ethnographic interviews and life history portraits, the thesis demonstrates that rural girls have multiple aspirations for school, work, parenthood, relationships, travel and lifestyle, as well as affective aspirations such as those for happiness, success, independence and balance. This thesis demonstrates how these aspirations, and the capacity to fulfil them, are shaped by the girls' cultural worlds. The study is part of an emerging body of work that recognises the importance of culture in understanding adolescent aspirations. It generates new conclusions about how and why culture matters by exploring the impact of the socio-cultural context on a broader range of adolescent aspirations than most other existing studies. Few existing studies take a culturally contextualised approach to exploring various aspirations in connection with one another. There are even fewer studies that do so with an adolescent, rural, female cohort. Through taking an ethnographic approach, this research is able to show how many cultural factors are interwoven with other factors and how this impacts on adolescent life aspirations and the associated educational and career decision-making. In doing so, this study contributes new insights into how culture and 'cultural capacities' create educational, social and/or rural disadvantage. For example, it highlights how aspects of culture such as community and family traditions, expectations, norms and values shape 'capacity' and how this may then influence participation in higher education and educational outcomes. These insights are particularly relevant for policy makers concerned with how to widen participation in higher education and how to address access barriers to education, particularly for disadvantaged groups. The findings from

this study are also relevant for education providers and practitioners in terms of engaging adolescents who are traditionally under-represented in education, including those from rural and regional locations. The study uses detailed life history portraits and thematic analysis of rural girls' shared aspirations and influences to illustrate how and why culture matters. These portraits are constructed from personal stories collected during in-depth interviews and they include in-context cultural descriptions and the girls' own thoughts and feelings regarding their many aspirations. The thematic analysis of the personal stories collected provides for additional understanding of the impact of the socio-cultural context by identifying the girls' shared aspirations and influences. Largely through its approach, this study generates new conclusions about how the aspirations of rural adolescent girls are culturally constructed and how this impacts on school and work decision-making.

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1. Aspirations and opening the curtains on culture

“Aspirations are never simply individual (as the language of wants and choices inclines us to think). They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life. As far back as Emile Durkheim and George Herbert Mead, we have learned that there is no self outside the social frame, setting and mirror.” (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67)

This study

This research qualitatively explores the life aspirations of 11 adolescent girls living in rural and remote areas of the Cradle Coast region of Tasmania. More specifically, the study responds to the research question, “How are the aspirations of adolescent girls in the Cradle Coast region shaped by their cultural worlds?”. In this study, aspirations are seen to be goals that represent what is desired the most under ideal circumstances (see Lee & Rojewski, 2005; Rojewski, 2009). Aspirations are therefore not seen to be the same as expectations, plans or ‘choices’, despite this being theoretically possible (see Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011).

Based on Appadurai’s (2004) discussions around aspirations and culture more specifically, ‘cultural worlds’ in this study include the “values, morals, habits, and material life of any community” (p. 83). Other aspects of culture such as shared expectations, norms, traditions, beliefs, actions, emotions and understandings are also a part of cultural worlds (see Phelan, Davidson Locke & Thanh Cao, 1991). In addition to the above, cultural worlds in this study include the ‘multiple worlds’ of the community, school, family and peer worlds and consist of “cultural knowledge and behaviour” (Phelan et al., 1991, p. 225). They are therefore complex and defined largely by the shared knowledges and understandings of members of a group.

Research that explores adolescent aspirations crosses many disciplines, including psychology, sociology, education and anthropology. Most of this research

concentrates largely on adolescent aspirations for school and work and rarely explores the broader context of these aspirations (some of the known exceptions include Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2010; Baird, Rose & McWhirter, 2012; Bok, 2010; Brown, 2011; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2001; Thompson & Holland, 2002; Wierenga, 2009). There are therefore very few studies that explore *all* adolescent goals, including those for education, careers, travel, relationships, parenthood and lifestyle.

There are even fewer studies that explore these alongside the various underlying affective aspirations such as those for happiness, success, independence and balance (some of the known exceptions include Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2010; Baird et al., 2012; Bok, 2010; Brown, 2011). As a result, there is a limited understanding of the full range of adolescent aspirations and the interconnections between these. The way in which balancing multiple aspirations influences educational and career decision-making has received little discussion in research, particularly in the case of rural adolescent girls.

In addition to this, existing studies do not typically explore the impact of the socio-cultural context on a broad range of adolescent aspirations (some of the known exceptions include Bok, 2010; Thomson & Holland, 2002; Wierenga, 2009). Very little is known about the interactions between many influencing factors and how these impact on adolescent life aspirations and the associated educational and workforce decision-making, particularly in the case of rural girls.

By exploring the impacts of the broader socio-cultural setting on adolescent life aspirations, this research generates new conclusions about how and why culture matters and adds to the emerging body of work in this area that considers the role of culture in shaping adolescent aspirations (e.g. Bettie, 2002; Bok, 2010; Corbett, 2007, 2009; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Hemmings, 2006; Prosser, McCallum, Milroy, Comber & Nixon, 2008; Reay, 2006; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009; Smith, 2011; Thomson & Holland, 2002; Thomson, Bell, Holland, Henderson, McGrellis & Sharpe, 2002; Wierenga, 2009; Winterton & Irwin, 2012).

These studies demonstrate that the impact of culture is currently being further explored in educational research and that this is an important consideration for future

research on this topic. This current recognition of the role of culture, in connection with the theories emerging in recent educational research, has informed the research question of this study and the decision to explore cultural worlds. This is discussed in more detail in the literature review in Chapter Two.

The focus on rural adolescent girls in this study, aged between 14 and 16 years old, is largely due to the fact that there are very few ethnographic studies that explore life aspirations specifically with this cohort. There are even fewer studies that explore the impacts of the broader socio-cultural context, with this cohort, on a range of aspirations. It is therefore difficult to find meaningful insights into the aspirations of rural adolescent girls and the associated educational and workforce decision-making. Further to this, research demonstrates that gender has a significant impact on aspirations (e.g. Battle & Wigfield, 2004; Evans & Diekmann, 2009; Furlong & Biggart, 1999; Gottfredson, 1981; Hoffnang, 2004; Patton & Creed, 2007; Rainey & Borders, 1997); the career development process is more complicated for women; and there are calls for research that explores the complexities of women's lives and circumstances (e.g. Cartwright, 2004; Harris, 2002; O'Brien & Fassinger, 1993).

Existing research that includes the voices and perspectives of young people is limited (see McDowell, 2000; St Clair & Benjamin, 2010), and arguably this is more so the case with young rural girls. For example, according to Jones (2004),

“Young rural women are one of the most structurally disadvantaged groups in society, yet are almost totally neglected in social research.” (p. 212)

This study therefore gives voice to members of a marginal cohort by describing and analysing the experiences and aspirations of rural females. Providing a platform for young rural girls to have a voice, this study enables an understanding of the lives and aspirations of a marginalised group. This includes an understanding of the challenges this cohort encounters in fulfilling their aspirations in life, including those for higher education. Understanding these challenges then allows for insights into how to address educational, social and/or rural disadvantage. These insights may be useful for both educational policy as well as educational practice.

Addressing access inequities to higher education for disadvantaged students and widening participation in higher education is currently a concern on a local, national and international scale (see Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Bok, 2010; Cavagnah-Russell, 2009; Gale, 2010; Sellar, Gale & Parker, 2011; Smith, 2011; St Clair & Benjamin, 2011; Watts & Bridges, 2006). This research therefore responds to current concerns surrounding rural educational disadvantage.

Aspirations and participation in higher education policy

Adolescent aspirations are currently at the forefront of policy conversations on widening participation and increasing access to higher education. This may be seen particularly in recent policy initiatives that hope to increase access to higher education for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds; through ‘raising’ aspirations (e.g. Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2009; Department for Education and Skills, 2007; Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2009; National Assembly for Wales, 2001).

These initiatives have created some debate in education circles which is typically associated with Raco’s (2009) ‘politics of aspiration’. Raco (2009) criticises governments for emphasising aspirations as individual motivational traits that may be ‘raised’, and for suggesting that the reason behind low participation in higher education is a result of non-aspirational citizenship. Raco argues that these policies downplay the responsibility of the state to provide services and access to higher education, and place the emphasis of agency and control on the individual rather than on social constraints and circumstances.

Other research criticises the policy view that aspirations are individual constructs alone, and suggests a need for governments to further consider the impacts of structural, social and/or cultural factors on aspirations and participation in higher education (see Brown, 2011; Clarke, 2005; Hinton, 2011; Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2011; St Clair & Benjamin, 2010). Researchers argue that aspirations need to be considered as social and cultural constructs rather than as individual traits (Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2011; St Clair, 2010) and that the focus must shift away from the individual as being solely responsible for low participation in higher education (Brown, 2011; Clarke, 2005; Hinton, 2011).

Widening participation policy initiatives have also received criticism for implying that aspirations for anything other than higher education are inadequate, inferior or lacking (e.g. Baxter, Tate & Hatt, 2007; Brown, 2011; Gale, 2010; Raco, 2009; Watts & Bridges, 2006). Watts and Bridges (2006) question the dominant middle class view that appears to inform widening participation policy, that aspirations for higher education are more valuable than any other aspirations. Additionally, Gale (2010) states that judging aspirations outside those for higher education as inferior, is 'condescending'. Brown (2011) also questions the suggestion that aspiring for attainable careers or those that do not require a tertiary qualification, is a sign of inadequacy. Further to these arguments, Slack (2003) questions the usefulness of 'raising' aspirations without increasing opportunity at the outset for all students to access higher education.

The most recent criticisms of participation policies concerned with 'raising aspirations' or 'aiming higher' target the suggestion that students who are under-represented in higher education are those who are most lacking in aspiration (see Brown, 2011; Gale, 2010; Sellar et al., 2011; Smith, 2011; St Clair & Benjamin, 2011; Watts & Bridges, 2006). In Australia, students who are currently under-represented in higher education include Indigenous students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students from regional and remote locations (see Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008; Smith, 2011). In Australia, family income, educational level, unemployment status and occupational status are typical indicators for socioeconomic disadvantage (Australian Bureau of Statistics Population and Housing [ABS], 2011).

An emerging body of research challenges the suggestion that students who are traditionally under-represented in higher education have low aspirations or no aspirations for higher education and demonstrates that persisting inequities to access, not low aspirations, are at the root of low participation rates (see Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert & Muspratt, 2004; Bok, 2010; Bowden & Doughney, 2010; Prosser et al., 2008; Smith, 2011; St Clair & Benjamin, 2011).

Research shows that despite many different approaches by the Australian government over the years to address access to higher education inequities, they still remain (see Bowden & Doughney, 2010; Gale, 2010; James, 2002). This has prompted calls for a

new approach to increasing access to higher education for disadvantaged students. (e.g. Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010; Gale & Tranter, 2011; Prosser et al., 2008; Sellar & Gale, 2011; Smith, 2011).

This research project provides some insights into such an approach, particularly in respect to students who are disadvantaged because of ‘rurality’.

The Cradle Coast region

The field site for this research is the Cradle Coast region of Tasmania. This is a rural and remote region comprising nine municipalities around the west and north-west coast of Tasmania. These municipalities are Circular Head, Waratah-Wynyard, King Island, Burnie, the West Coast, the Central Coast, Devonport, Latrobe and Kentish. Each municipality, and the towns within them, has its own unique character, including varying degrees of isolation (see map below of the Braddon electorate¹). The author begins this section, however, by describing the region as a whole.



¹ Source - <http://www.electoral.tas.gov.au/pages/HouseOfAssembly/Braddon.html> - The Braddon electorate consists of the nine municipalities within the Cradle Coast region

The Cradle Coast region is approximately one-third of the area of the state. It is a region that is recognised for its diverse landscapes, including largely untouched wilderness, forest and mountain areas as well as farming land and old mining towns (Department of Transport and Regional Services [DOTARS], 2003). According to recent census data, the population of the region sits at around 112,000 people which represents approximately one-fifth of the total population of Tasmania (Australian Bureau of Statistics Regional Profile [ABS], 2010).

In terms of the population distribution, most people live in three local government areas: Devonport, Burnie and the Central Coast (Institute for Regional Development [IRD], 2009). The West Coast, King Island and Circular Head municipalities are the most sparsely populated in the region, followed by Waratah-Wynyard and Kentish (IRD, 2009). Although the population of the region is ageing, the majority of the people, including those who move to the region (in-migrants), are of working age (IRD, 2009).

Burnie and Devonport are major seaports and they are the only two regional cities in the Cradle Coast with populations of around 20, 000 and 30, 000 people respectively (Australian Electoral Commission [AEC], 2012; ABS, 2010). Burnie and Devonport both have regional airports that create a platform for mobility across the Bass Strait and employment opportunities more broadly. Devonport is the home of a ferry that provides a sea link to Melbourne, which is also significant in terms of mobility and employment opportunities. The region also hosts two public hospitals in each of Burnie and Latrobe, and one private hospital in Burnie, which provide employment opportunities and medical services.

One of the three major Tasmanian campuses of the University of Tasmania is also located in Burnie, providing the opportunity to engage in tertiary education in the region itself. Also in Burnie, and almost directly across the road from the university, are campuses for the Tasmanian Academy (Hellyer College) and TasTAFE. The Tasmanian Academy focuses on academic pathways, but also delivers some vocational education and training (VET) subjects to year 11 and 12 students. TasTAFE, on the other hand, focuses on delivering vocational education and training (VET) and caters to students of all ages beginning from year 11 onwards. There is

another Tasmanian Academy campus in Devonport (Don College) and there are two other campuses for TasTAFE, one in Smithton and one in Devonport.

There are five private high schools spread across the Cradle Coast region that also offer years 11 and 12 education. These are located in Smithton, Ulverstone, Burnie, Devonport and Latrobe. What these schools offer in terms of academic and vocational courses varies. In the Tasmanian context, 'college' is the term that is typically used when referring to years 11 and 12 education. In the Tasmanian context, 'high school' is the term that is typically used when referring to years seven through to ten.

In terms of public high schools, there are 14 in the region, with six of these being district schools. District schools are generally inland from the north-west coast and their students range from kindergarten age through to Grade 10, and sometimes up to Grades 11 or 12 (typically known as K-10, K-11, or K-12). There are approximately 30 public primary schools in the region, most of which are also based along the north-west coast. There are seven private schools in the region, two of which provide for kindergarten to Grade 12 students.

The Cradle Coast region is considered low-performing in terms of the attainment of university level qualifications, which are lower than both the state and national averages (DOTARS, 2003; Guenther & Langworthy, 2010; IRD, 2009). The number of people with a vocational or trade qualification in the region, however, is higher than the state and national average (DOTARS, 2003; IRD, 2009). In particular, the number of people aged 15 years and over in the Cradle Coast region with trade qualifications in engineering and related technologies, is higher than the state and national average (IRD, 2009).

The low level of post year 12 qualifications may be attributed, in part, to a No Higher Education Family Tradition (NOHEFT) in the region in relation to tertiary education and a strong trade and vocational culture, or school-to-work culture (see Gabriel & Walters, 2002; Guenther & Langworthy, 2010). Gabriel and Walters (2002) reported that the majority of north-west Tasmanian students in their study did not have aspirations that required a tertiary level qualification. They further reported that many young people in the region had aspirations for non-professional careers and their intentions were highly gendered and traditional (Gabriel & Walters, 2002). The low

level of post year 12 qualifications may also be associated with Guenther and Langworthy's (2010) finding that many in the region do not have the social capital necessary for engaging in higher education.

Hands-on and vocational qualifications are valued within the region and have influenced the skills base on the Cradle Coast. According to the Institute for Regional Development (2009), workers in the Cradle Coast "clearly have informal, on-the-job skills and know-how, however, formal and professional-level skills are rare, even in our key industries" (p. 72).

The key industries in the region include manufacturing, agriculture, forestry and fishing, mining, retail trade and tourism (AEC, 2012; DOTARS, 2003; IRD, 2009). The manufacturing industry employs the largest number of people in the region and these are mostly labourers, machinery operators and sales workers (IRD, 2009). More than half of the employees in manufacturing have no formal tertiary level qualifications (IRD, 2009). Following manufacturing, and in this order, other key employing industries are retail trade, health care and social assistance, agriculture, forestry and fishing and then education and training (IRD, 2009). The region has also been described as having an 'entrepreneurial culture' as 'microenterprises predominate' (IRD, 2009, p. 59).

The region's most highly educated workers (with a bachelor's degree or higher) are largely employed in education and training, health care and social assistance, followed by public administration and safety, with these industries all dominated by females (IRD, 2009). This suggests that a high proportion of females are completing tertiary education in the region. However, labour force participation is low for women, with only one-fifth in full-time employment and nearly half not employed at all (IRD, 2009).

'Fields of qualification' in the region are 'highly gendered', with women predominantly in teaching, nursing, human welfare studies and services, business and management, and food and hospitality, and men predominantly in mechanical and industrial engineering and technology, building, electrical and electronic engineering and technology, and automotive engineering and technology (IRD, 2009). According to 2006 census data, the highest percentage of workers in the region were technicians

and trade workers (16%), labourers (15.6%), managers (13.4%) and professionals (12.8%), and unemployment is at 8.1% (Australian Bureau of Statistics Regional Profile [ABS], 2006). The most recent census data, however, shows that this has changed, and that the highest percentage of workers in the region are now labourers (18.2%) and clerical and administrative workers (15%) followed by tradespersons and related workers (13.9%), professionals (12.7%) and community and personal service workers (10.1%). The number of managers has decreased significantly to 7.7% (Australian Bureau of Statistics Regional Profile [ABS], 2009).

The majority of households in the Cradle Coast are middle income; however, just over one-quarter of households in the region earn less than \$500 per week (IRD, 2009). In comparison to the state overall, the Cradle Coast region has a significantly lower socio-economic base (Guenther & Langworthy, 2010; IRD, 2009). On the other end of the scale, there are fewer than 10 per cent of high income earners on more than \$2000 per week (IRD, 2009). It has also been suggested that the gap between the wealthy and those earning a low income is bigger in the Cradle Coast region in comparison to the rest of the state and that “poverty is widely recognised as an issue” (Stride Consulting, 2004, p. 15).

In addition to this, the SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage suggests that the Cradle Coast region is relatively disadvantaged (ABS, 2011) with some municipalities ranking higher than others in terms of this disadvantage, such as Devonport and the West Coast. SEIFA scores for advantage and disadvantage are based on specific indicators such as family income levels, educational levels, unemployment status and occupational levels, obtained through census data.

Why the Cradle Coast?

The author was born and raised in the Cradle Coast region and has an interest in the topic of aspirations because of her own experiences as a teenager. This is what initially influenced the author’s decision to conduct the research here. Justifications outside of the author’s own personal interest are outlined below.

Studies have found that both rurality and socio-economic status, or social class, have a significant influence on aspirations and participation in higher education (e.g. Abbott-Chapman, 2001; Apostol & Bilden, 1991; Baynes, Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002; Bradley et al., 2008; Corbett, 2007, 2009; Gale, 2010; Griffin, 1985; James, Wyn, Baldwin, Helpworth, McInnis & Stephanou, 1999; Marks, Flemming, Long & McMillan, 2000; Rojewski, 2005; Warner-Smith & Lee, 2001; Willis, 1979). The Cradle Coast is rural and remote, with many isolated communities, and the region has a significantly lower socio-economic base in comparison to other regions in the state (Guenther & Langworthy, 2010; IRD, 2009). The terms ‘rural’ and ‘remote’ are used broadly in this study to mean locations outside of metropolitan cities (Hugo, 2000, as cited in Robinson, 2012). Some communities within the region are more isolated than others in terms of their geographical distance from the two regional centres. This therefore means there is some variation in the ‘degree’ of rurality depending on where that community is situated within the Cradle Coast region.

There are other cultural factors in the Cradle Coast region that may combine to influence aspirations as well as participation. Previous studies in the region, for example, have made connections between certain aspects of culture, participation in education and/or aspirations. Some of these cultural factors were mentioned earlier in this chapter and include: the No Higher Education Family Tradition (NOHEFT); a school-to-work culture; the seemingly high value placed on vocational pathways; traditional and gendered vocational intentions; non-professional stream occupational aspirations; and social capital that does not encourage engagement in higher education (Gabriel & Walters, 2002; Guenther & Langworthy, 2010; IRD, 2009).

The field site for this research allows for an understanding of how multiple factors combine to create barriers to fulfilling aspirations, including barriers to fulfilling aspirations for higher education. It enables for cultural factors to be further explored, in connection with rurality and socio-economic status, and to add to the emerging body of literature on why culture matters (e.g. Bok, 2010; Hemmings, 2006; Prosser et al., 2008; Smith, 2011; Thomson & Holland, 2002; Wierenga, 2009; Winterton & Irwin, 2012).

An introduction to the conceptual framework in this study

An introduction to the theories

The conceptual framework for this study draws on three core theories that allow for a culturally contextualised understanding of adolescent aspirations. This includes aspirations for education, careers, relationships, parenthood, travel and lifestyle, as well as underlying affective aspirations such as those for happiness, success, independence and balance. The framework is informed by Appadurai's (2004) concept of 'the capacity to aspire', Bourdieu's (1973) theory of social reproduction and cultural capital, and Phelan et al.'s (1991) multiple worlds model. As separate theories, these all allow for the impact of cultural factors on aspirations to be explored. When these theories are combined in a framework, however, they enable a greater contextual understanding of how several social and cultural experiences impact on aspirations and the capacity to fulfil these. The framework for this study is guided by the emerging recognition of culture in the literature on adolescent aspirations and the need for in-depth and in-context life aspirations research, which is illustrated in Chapter Two.

For Appadurai (2004), 'the capacity to aspire' is a 'cultural capacity', a 'navigational capacity' and a 'metacapacity'. Appadurai (2004) argues that the 'capacity to aspire' is a cultural capacity, as aspirations are formed in the social setting and influenced by access to social, cultural and economic experiences. According to Appadurai (2004), exposure to experiences in a range of different social settings also influences knowledge of how to negotiate particular spaces (their navigational capacity) and an individual's set of capacities (their metacapacity).

Based on these ideas from Appadurai (2004), 'the capacity to aspire' is a collection of cultural resources or 'capacities' that stem from exposure to a range of experiences across socio-cultural settings. As culture impacts on capacities, it influences what an individual is able to aspire to and what an individual is able to accomplish based on the available resources (Appadurai, 2004). Appadurai (2004) posits that culture shapes what is seen to be most valuable in life, which impacts on aspirations or visions of 'the good life'. This suggests that culture shapes perceptions or worldviews prior to impacting on aspirations.

Bourdieu (1973) also acknowledges the ways in which social and cultural settings shape aspirations or the capacity to fulfil them. Bourdieu's (1973) theory, however, allows for more specific concepts related to social class and family background to be explored, such as those that impact on access and opportunity. These include 'social reproduction', 'cultural capital', 'social capital', 'economic capital', the 'field' and 'habitus'.

According to Bourdieu (1986), an individual's access to opportunities and chances of success are influenced by a combination of types of capital. The three main forms of capital (or power) that Bourdieu (1973, 1986) discusses are 'cultural capital' (class-based skills, knowledge and experiences), 'economic capital' (accumulated wealth), and 'social capital' (accumulated social networks). For Bourdieu (1973), success at school is largely dependent on cultural capital and this impacts on an individual's capacity to fulfil their educational aspirations. He also argues that success at school is influenced by 'habitus' (values, manners and preferences) and experience navigating certain social spaces, in particular, 'the field' of education. For Bourdieu (1986), class-based experiences influence both 'capital' and 'habitus'. This then influences access to resources and the capacity to fulfil aspirations. Based on these ideas from Bourdieu (1973, 1986), aspirations and the capacity to fulfil them may also be seen as a collection of cultural resources that consist of the different types of 'capital' and 'habitus' - rather than 'capacities', as is the case with Appadurai (2004).

Phelan et al.'s (1991) multiple worlds model also forms part of the framework for this study. It allows for student experiences to be explored within the multiple worlds of the community, school, family and peer worlds. The model further enables an understanding of how these experiences impact on 'the self' and on schooling outcomes or the capacity to fulfil educational aspirations. Phelan et al. (1991) argue that if students are able to adapt to different norms, traditions and expectations across multiple worlds then their success at school is increased because of these 'adaptation strategies'. Phelan et al. (1991) further suggest that multiple worlds, and the experiences within these, also shape other aspects of 'the self' – not just 'adaptation strategies'. These include perceptions, thoughts, understandings, feelings and meanings (see Phelan et al., 1991), which arguably form part of an individual's worldview. In addition to this, Phelan et al. (1991) argue that students may

successfully cross the borders of different worlds; however, doing so requires an adjustment to their identity. This suggests that ‘multiple worlds’ also influence identities as well as worldviews.

Phelan et al.’s (1991) concept of ‘adaptation strategies’ is not dissimilar to Appadurai’s (2004) notion of the ‘navigational capacity’ or Bourdieu’s (1973) ideas about gaining experience in the ‘field’. The three theories all allow for an understanding of how this navigational strategy, which is first shaped by experiences in socio-cultural settings, impacts on the capacity to fulfil aspirations. All three theories further allow for an understanding of how cultural worldviews or class-based habitus shape aspirations. Drawing on Phelan et al. (1991) further enables an understanding of how identity shapes aspirations. When combined in a framework, the theories provide a lens through which to look at how culture shapes adolescent aspirations. A diagram of the framework is presented on the following page, followed by a description of the way in which these theories inform the conceptual framework in this study.

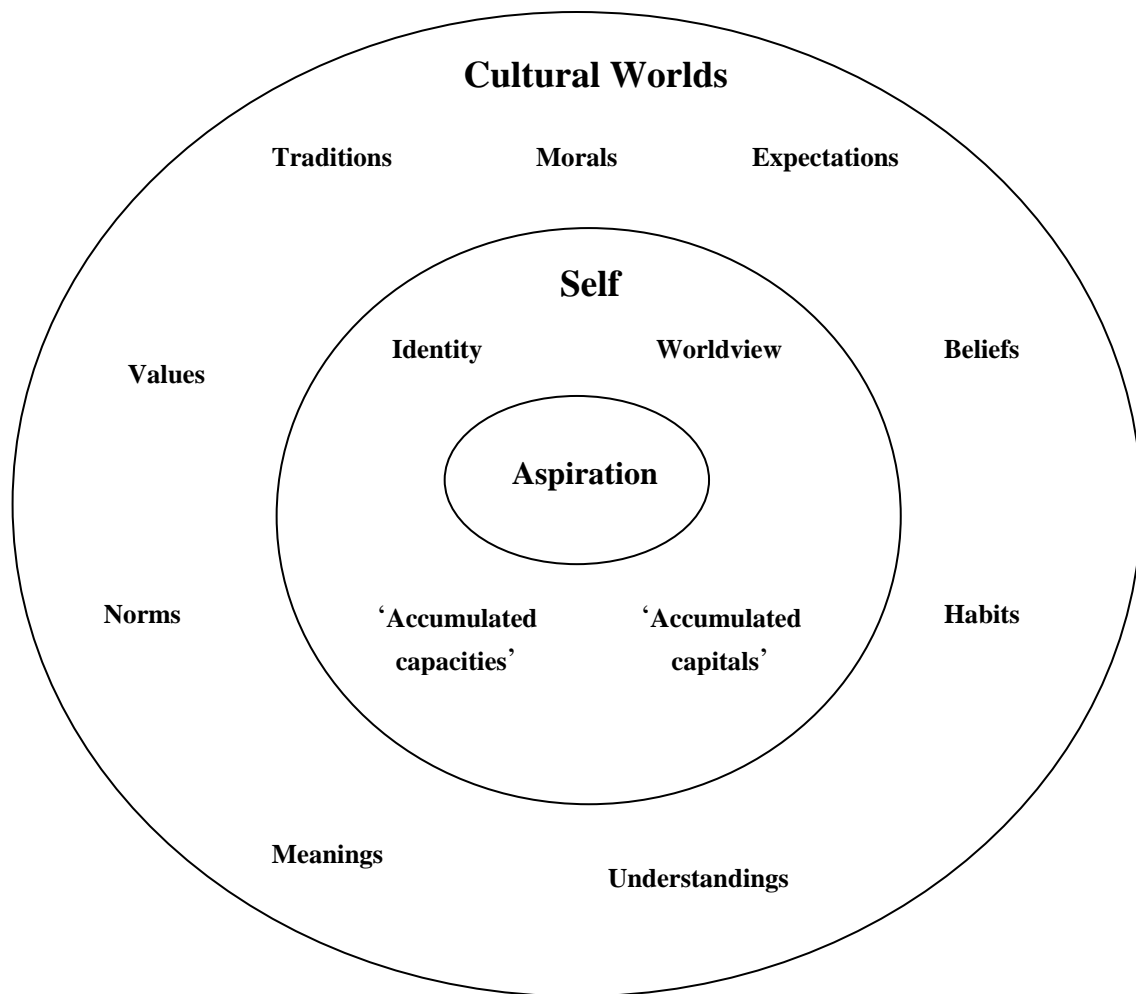


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Informed by Appadurai (2004), Bourdieu (1973) and Phelan et al. (1991)

An introduction to the framework for this study

Based on the emerging literature and the theories listed above, in this study cultural worlds are seen to shape adolescent aspirations; this occurs through two kinds of impact: firstly through the impact cultural worlds have on aspects of 'the self', including identity and worldview; and secondly, through the impact that cultural worlds have on resources, including 'accumulated capacities' and 'accumulated capitals'.

The first kind of impact that cultural worlds have on aspirations is via the impact they have on identity and worldview. It is proposed that cultural world experiences

influence how an individual sees the world and what they see as valuable or important in life (see Appadurai, 2004). According to Appadurai (2004), these perceptions and thoughts form a broader system of beliefs about life, an individual's worldview, which then shape aspirations. In this study, an individual's worldview, or broader belief system (Appadurai, 2004), is seen to be one aspect of 'the self' and further includes Bourdieu's (1986) habitus, and what Phelan et al. (1991) more specifically refer to as "meanings, perceptions, understandings, thoughts, feelings and adaptation strategies" (p. 228). From this, the author proposes that cultural worlds shape worldviews and these then shape aspirations or the capacity to fulfil these.

Phelan et al. (1991) also argue that an adjustment to identity is necessary to have the 'adaptation strategies' required to cross the boundaries of the school, family and peer worlds. For some students this means making an adjustment to their true identity or selves to adapt to social settings that differ greatly from what they are mostly familiar with (Phelan et al., 1991). This suggests that identity is shaped by various experiences within the peer, school and family worlds. In this study, and guided by Phelan et al. (1991), identity is therefore seen to be an aspect of 'the self' that is socially and culturally constructed (see also Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998). From this, the author proposes that cultural worlds shape identity and what an individual can identify with, and this then shapes aspirations or the capacity to fulfil these. Cultural worlds therefore impact on both identity and worldview, and together, or separately, these shape aspirations.

The second way in which cultural worlds influence aspirations is through the impact they have on 'resources'. 'Resources' in this study include the 'accumulated capacities' and 'accumulated capitals' that individuals acquire in their cultural worlds. 'Accumulated capacities' include Appadurai's notions of cultural capacity, metacapacity and navigational capacity, as discussed above. 'Accumulated capacities' therefore include skills and knowledge as well as an awareness of how to negotiate various social spaces. They also include 'adaptation strategies', which are the individual's ability to adapt their identity across worlds and their capacity to adapt to the different norms, traditions, expectations, values and understandings that may be attributed to different social settings or worlds (Phelan et al., 1991). 'Accumulated capitals' in this study are Bourdieu's 'cultural capital', 'social capital', 'economic

capital' and 'habitus', as discussed above, as well as other capitals or knowledge that an individual may have.

Cultural worlds therefore impact on an individual's accumulated capacities and capitals. These accumulated resources may then be used to access opportunities – including educational opportunities. Cultural worlds influence aspirations as they influence access to the resources that an individual may need to fulfil their aspirations.

The framework has been developed based on the need to further explore how culture impacts on aspirations, which is a current focus in emerging aspirations research. The framework for this study allows for the research question to be fully explored and for new insights to be generated in terms of how culture matters when it comes to 'the capacity to aspire' and addressing social, educational and rural disadvantage.

A qualitative ethnographic approach

In order to respond to the research question, "How are the aspirations of adolescent girls in the Cradle Coast region shaped by their cultural worlds?", this study is located in the narrative/constructivist paradigm and employs a highly qualitative ethnographic approach. This methodology allows for a culturally contextualised understanding of adolescent life aspirations. The approach in this study combines narrative and ethnography for two main reasons. Firstly, because this allows for an understanding of the complexities within the socio-cultural context; and secondly, because it allows for knowledge to be constructed and co-created through the telling and writing of stories (see Bruner, 1986, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, 2011; Schwandt, 2000; Shkedi, 2005).

The approach is guided by the review of the literature, which suggests a need for aspirations research that allows for a deeper culturally contextualised understanding of how adolescent life aspirations are shaped. The literature review in Chapter Two details emerging trends in aspirations research that informs the methodological approach to this study. In short, however, two current directions are mentioned here as a means of providing the reader with some understanding of the need for this approach. Firstly, researchers in Australia and the United Kingdom are beginning to qualitatively explore the broader contexts of adolescent aspirations, including certain

underlying affective aspirations such as those for happiness, success, personal fulfilment and independence (e.g. Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2010; Brown, 2011; Thomson & Holland, 2002). And, secondly, researchers are beginning to qualitatively explore the complexities of the socio-cultural context and how these shape adolescent aspirations. This may be seen in the participation in higher education research in Australia and youth transitions/biographical research in the United Kingdom and United States (e.g. Bok, 2010; Hemmings, 2006; Smith, 2011; Thompson & Holland, 2002).

These trends stem from the fact that the literature on adolescent life aspirations outside of the contexts of school and work is limited and few studies explore adolescent life aspiration in depth and in context. The emerging trends suggest there is a need for approaches in aspirations research that capture the full range of adolescent life aspirations and the cultural details and insider perspectives in context. The approach in this study enables an understanding of the many ways that cultural worlds impact on aspirations, or the capacity to fulfil these, and an understanding of the associated school and work decision-making. In doing so, it also allows for new conclusions to be drawn that may be of interest to education policy makers and education providers and practitioners. The overall methodological approach is informed by the literature and is necessary for exploring all of the concepts in the conceptual framework and for responding to the research question. It is outlined in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Contribution to the existing body of knowledge

This thesis demonstrates how rural girls have multiple aspirations in life, including those for school, work, parenthood, relationships, travel and lifestyle, as well as affective aspirations such as those for happiness, success, independence and balance. This thesis further shows how these goals, and the capacity to fulfil them, are shaped by the girls' cultural worlds. The study contributes to the emerging body of work that recognises the importance of culture in understanding adolescent aspirations (e.g. Bok, 2010; Corbett, 2007, 2009; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Gale, 2010; Prosser et al., 2008; Smith, 2011; Thompson & Holland, 2002; Winterton & Irwin, 2012). Prior to more recent times, Paul Willis's (1979) ethnography of working class 'lads' in an

industrial town in England and Christine Griffin's (1985) ethnography of working class girls in Birmingham, both provided significant insights into how culture, social class and gender impacted on school and work outcomes.

This study extends on this body of knowledge by generating new conclusions on how and why culture matters by exploring the impact of the socio-cultural context on a broader range of adolescent aspirations than are typically examined in research. Few existing studies take an ethnographic, contextualised approach to exploring multiple aspirations in connection with one another. There are even fewer studies that do so with rural adolescent girls. Through taking an ethnographic approach, this research is able to illustrate how many cultural factors are interwoven with other factors and how this impacts on adolescent life aspirations. In doing so, this study produces new insights into how culture and 'cultural capacities' create educational, social and/or rural disadvantage and insights useful for understanding school and work decision-making.

These insights are particularly relevant for current policy (in Australia and other countries around the world) on widening participation in higher education and addressing access barriers to education, particularly for marginalised groups. The findings from this study also produce insights that may be of interest to education providers and practitioners around how to further engage students in education who are traditionally under-represented. This research therefore generates new conclusions about how to build the capacity of disadvantaged students so that they may engage with and participate in higher education, if they have the desire to do so.

At a grassroots level, the study responds to local concerns around increasing engagement in higher education and improving on post year 12 attainment levels. The University of Tasmania (Cradle Coast Campus), for example, has been working in partnership since 1997 with the Cradle Coast Authority and other key stakeholders to increase engagement in education through various participation projects and initiatives (see Cavanagh-Russell, 2009).

Outline of the Thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters. This first chapter has introduced the topic of aspirations, the significance of this research and the thesis overall. Chapter Two is a review of the literature surrounding adolescent aspirations and closely related topics such as participation in education, school-to-work transitions and success at school. The methodology is presented in Chapter Three and includes details of the research approach and methods, and a rationale for these. Chapter Four contains rich, culturally contextualised life history portraits of each of the 11 girls in this study. This is followed by the shared findings in Chapter Five, which uses thematic analysis of all data collected to examine the aspirations and experiences of the girls in this study. Chapter Six is a discussion chapter that concentrates on how the study responds to the research question specifically. Chapter Seven concludes the thesis and discusses the key insights obtained from the study.

2. Acknowledging culture: A new direction for research

“It is in culture that ideas of the future, as much as those about the past, are embedded and nurtured.” (Appadurai, 2004, p. 59)

Aspirations: An introduction

What are aspirations?

As mentioned in Chapter One, research that explores adolescent aspirations is cross-disciplinary and is typically located within the psychology, social psychology, sociology, anthropology and education literatures. The cross-disciplinary nature of aspirations research means that aspirations are defined in many different ways. How aspirations are defined in the literature and in this study is briefly introduced below.

In the literature that explores aspirations, youth transitions, schooling experiences, life chances and youth migration the term aspirations is often used interchangeably with choices, intentions and expectations (e.g. Davey & Stoppard, 1993; Davies & Pearce, 2007; Francis, 2002; Gabriel & Walters, 2002; Jones, O’Sullivan & Rouse, 2004; Kerpleman, 2002; Sanders & Munford, 2008; Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Strand & Winston, 2008; Thomson & Holland, 2002; Wierenga, 2009; Winterton & Irwin, 2012). This gives the impression that aspirations are seen to mean the same as choices, intentions or expected pathways – especially when expectations or intentions are used as a measure of aspiration (e.g. Kao & Thompson, 2003; Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Strand & Winston, 2008; Thomson & Holland, 2002).

In contrast to this, however, other research frames aspirations as different from expectations (Armstrong & Crombie, 2000; Beal & Crockett, 2010; Dalley-Trim, 2012; Dalley-Trim & Alloway, 2010; Gottfredson, 1981; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011; Siren, Diemer, Jackson, Gonsalves & Howell, 2004). Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) distinguish between aspirations and expectations, stating that the former represents “what people hope to achieve” and the latter represents “what

people believe they will achieve” (p. 85). Beal and Crockett (2010) make a similar distinction, framing aspirations as goals that are most preferred and expectations as predicted outcomes. These perspectives from Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) and Beal and Crockett (2010) therefore see aspirations as ‘hopes’, and expectations as ‘beliefs’.

Research also exists that distinguishes between aspirations and actual work, and education choices or life chances (Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Rojewski, 2005; Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2001; Evans & Kelley, 2001). Rojewski (2005), for example, argues that aspirations can be used to predict occupational choices or outcomes; Abbott-Chapman (2011, p. 61) argues that in conjunction with other factors, such as values and priorities, aspirations influence educational and occupational choices.

In the aspirations literature more recently, St Clair and Benjamin (2010) state,

“There is a notable lack of rigorous thought about what exactly aspirations are, where they come from, what affects them and whether they actually make a difference to educational and occupational outcomes.” (p. 2)

St Clair and Benjamin (2010) connect the limited understanding of the range of adolescent aspirations, what these represent and how they influence young people’s future outcomes with the lack of research that includes the voices and perspectives of young people themselves (see also McDowell, 2000, p. 391). This suggests that future aspirations research with an adolescent cohort should include not only the voices of the participants, but should clearly define what aspirations represent, how they are shaped and what impact they have on school and work decision-making.

In this qualitative study of adolescent girls in the Cradle Coast region, aspirations represent an individual’s goals, wants or desires, under ideal circumstances (see Lee & Rojewski, 2009; Rojewski, 2005). They are not seen to be the same as choices, expectations and plans. Aspirations in this study include all hopes and desires that an individual has in life, whether these are considered by the individual or others as realistically achievable or not. Further to this, aspirations are not viewed in this study

as “simply responses that young people find effective to utter in particular situations” (p. 504) as suggested by St Clair and Benjamin (2011).

Emerging trends in aspirations research with adolescents

This chapter demonstrates that there is a concentration of aspirations research in the contexts of higher education and the workforce (see also Dalley-Trim, 2012; Dalley-Trim & Alloway, 2010). It also shows that research has explored numerous individual, social and cultural influences on adolescent educational and occupational aspirations. It illustrates, however, that studies that explore the full range of adolescent life aspirations are limited. There is less research, for example, that explores adolescent aspirations for school, work, relationships, travel, parenthood and lifestyle. There are even less that explore these in connection with underlying affective aspirations such as those for success, happiness, independence and balance. There is also a notable lack of research that explores adolescent aspirations in the broader socio-cultural context.

Possibly in response to this lack, research that explores adolescent aspirations outside of the contexts of school and work has recently emerged in the literature (e.g. Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2010; Baird et al., 2011; Bok, 2010; Brown, 2011; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2001; Thomson & Holland, 2002; Wierenga, 2009). The studies mentioned above demonstrate that adolescents have various life aspirations including, for example, those for relationships, higher education, careers, leaving home, having a loving family, having a good job and maintaining friendships and relationships. A few of these studies additionally explore the underlying affective aspirations that adolescents have, such as those for emotional wellbeing, personal fulfilment, security, success and happiness (e.g. Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2010; Baird et al., 2011; Bok, 2010; Brown, 2011; Thomson & Holland, 2002). The emerging life aspirations research therefore demonstrates a current trend to explore the broader range of adolescent aspirations, including underlying affective aspirations. Research is also beginning to emerge in the literature that explores the impacts of the socio-cultural context on a broader range of life goals (e.g. Bok, 2010; Thomson & Holland, 2002; Wierenga, 2009). These studies highlight how adolescent life aspirations, or the capacity to fulfil these, are shaped by aspects of culture associated with family background, local contexts and social structures (e.g. Bok, 2010; Thomson &

Holland, 2002; Wierenga, 2009). The studies demonstrate an emerging trend towards exploring the impact of culture on all adolescent goals.

Educational research that concentrates on adolescent aspirations for school and work, or ‘choices’, is also beginning to further explore the role of cultural influences (e.g. Bettie, 2002; Hemmings, 2006; Prosser et al., 2008; Reay, 2006; Reay et al., 2009; Smith, 2011; Thomson et al., 2002; Winterton & Irwin, 2012). Other research that explores youth transitions and youth migration is also beginning to explore how social and cultural constraints impact on the pathways available to young people and eventual decision-making (e.g. Corbett, 2007; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Easthorpe & Gabriel, 2008; Gabriel, 2004; Jones, 2004; Jones et al., 2004; Reay, 2005; Reay, Davies, David & Ball, 2001; Sanders & Munford, 2008). These studies further demonstrate an emerging trend to explore the role of social and cultural influences in research with adolescents regarding their futures.

In addition to the above, transitions research illustrates that the pathways available to adolescents and young people today are diverse, non-linear and fragmented largely due to changing social and economic structures (e.g. Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Abbott-Chapman & Kilpatrick, 2001; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Dwyer, Smith, Tyler & Wyn, 2003; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Harris, Rainey & Sumner, 2006). This suggests that in order to understand the decision-making associated with adolescent aspirations it is necessary to explore the role of the broader socio-cultural context.

The literature review illustrates that despite extensive research surrounding youth transitions, participation in higher education and adolescent aspirations; few existing studies explore the full range of adolescent aspirations, including underlying affective aspirations, in the broader socio-cultural context. The chapter demonstrates that research has explored the range of influences on adolescent school and work goals (and ‘choices’), but less research has explored life aspirations in context and in depth. The literature review highlights a need for future research to explore how cultural worlds shape adolescent life aspirations.

Theories in the literature

As there is a concentration of aspirations research in the contexts of school and work, there are many theories that have been developed to explore and understand educational and occupational aspirations. Some of these theories include the psychology-based career development theories (e.g. Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994; Super, 1990; Bandura, 1986; Gottfredson, 1981; Holland, 1959) and the sociology-based attainment or social reproduction theories (e.g. Bourdieu, 1973; Sewell, Haller & Portes, 1969; Blau & Duncan, 1967).

The career development theories typically explore the role of individual motivational traits such as self-efficacy, self-concept, interests, ability or personality (e.g. Lent et al., 1994; Super, 1990; Bandura, 1986; Gottfredson, 1981; Holland, 1959). Aspirations are viewed, for example, as a reflection of self-concept (the way an individual sees themselves) which may be firstly shaped by factors such as social class and gender, or abilities and interests (e.g. Gottfredson, 1981; Super, 1990). Alternatively, aspirations are seen to be significantly influenced by self-efficacy (the belief an individual has about their ability to perform a task) which may be initially shaped by family background factors, including social class, as well as interests, abilities and the outcomes expected from pursuing that goal (e.g. Lent et al., 1994; Bandura, 1986). On the other hand, Holland (1959) sees occupational aspirations as a direct reflection of personality traits, which are categorised based on characteristics such as interests, abilities and preferences (see Nauta, 2010).

In contrast to the psychological career development theories and research, the sociological attainment theories typically frame aspirations as a reflection of social stratification or parental status rather than a reflection of individual motivational traits (e.g. Blau & Duncan, 1967; Sewell et al., 1969). One sociological theory that is often drawn on in educational research is Bourdieu's (1973) theory of social reproduction. This considers aspirations as being reflective of social class, and considers the capacity for success, including success at school, as being reflective of a range of class-based family background factors.

Another perspective on aspirations stems from the anthropology of development or anthropology of education literatures. These theories frame aspirations as cultural

constructs and/or as a reflection of the culturally constructed ‘self’ (e.g. Hemmings, 2006; Appadurai, 2004; Phelan et al., 1991). The focus of anthropology-based theories is therefore on why culture matters and how the broader socio-cultural setting shapes aspirations.

The influence of culture and the impacts of a combination of factors in the broader socio-cultural setting on adolescent aspirations rarely feature in the career development and attainment literatures, where the bulk of aspirations research is concentrated. Recent educational research and debate suggests, however, that aspirations need to be understood as socially and culturally constructed rather than individual motivational traits (see Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010; Hemmings, 2006; Kenway & Hickey-Moody 2011; Prosser et al., 2008; Smith, 2011; St Clair & Benjamin 2011). This is further supported by the recent acknowledgement of the role of culture in the literature dealing with participation in education, youth transitions and youth migration literatures (e.g. Bettie, 2002; Easthorpe & Gabriel, 2008; Gabriel, 2004; Jones, 2004; Jones et al., 2004; Reay, 2006; Reay et al., 2009; Sanders & Munford, 2008; Smith, 2011; Thomson et al., 2002; Winterton & Irwin, 2012).

This study is guided by emerging trends in aspirations research and embraces new perspectives on what aspirations are and how they are shaped. It is therefore informed by the recent acknowledgement in education circles of the role of culture. This acknowledgement demonstrates a need for future research to consider theories that enable aspirations to be explored as socially and culturally constructed. Three theories that allow for this include Appadurai’s (2004) concept of ‘the capacity to aspire’, Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social reproduction and cultural capital and Phelan et al.’s (1991) multiple worlds model. These theories are combined to form the conceptual framework in this study and have been drawn on in recent aspirations research (e.g. Bok, 2010; Hemmings, 2006; Prosser et al., 2008; Smith, 2011).

These three theories see aspirations and the capacity to fulfil them as being significantly influenced by social and cultural factors. They allow for a broad range of aspirations to be explored and for multiple influences within the socio-cultural setting to be explored. The theories and how they inform the conceptual framework in this study are detailed in the following section.

The emerging recognition of culture

The 'capacity to aspire'

Appadurai's (2004) notion of 'the capacity to aspire' sees aspirations as a 'cultural capacity', rather than an individual trait, and considers the broader context of cultural worlds in shaping all future goals. This is an anthropological perspective that views culture as the most significant influence on aspirations. Appadurai (2004) explains that because aspirations are associated with "wants, preferences, choices and calculations" (p. 67), they have generally been connected to the market, economics and the individual. Rather than connecting aspirations to the individual, however, Appadurai (2004) argues that aspirations are socially and culturally constructed ideas.

He argues that aspirations stem from "larger cultural norms" (p. 67) and local understandings about "the good life". Appadurai (2004) sees ideas about "the good life" as culturally diverse visions that encompass the notions of health and happiness that may be expressed as aspirations for work, leisure, respect, friendships, marriage and virtue, for example. He places an emphasis on aspirations for the good life as including a set of cultural understandings and worldview:

"Aspirations to the good life are part of some sort of system of ideas...which locates them in a larger map of local ideas and beliefs about: life and death, the nature of worldly possessions, the significance of material assets over social relations, the relative illusion of social permanence for a society, and the value of peace or warfare." (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69)

These visions and local ideas about life play a key role in what an individual sees as valuable and what they come to aspire to. In addition to aspirations being a 'cultural capacity', Appadurai (2004) argues that 'the capacity to aspire' is also a 'metacapacity' and a 'navigational capacity'. Metacapacities represent an individual's set of capacities and this is built largely through exposure to a range of social, cultural and economic experiences. Appadurai likens his own notion of the 'metacapacity' to Sen's (1993) notion of the 'capability set'. Sen's (1993) 'capability set' includes all the things that a person is "able to do or be" (p. 30) based on what they are able to

manage in life. Greater exposure to a range of experiences also impacts on an individual's 'navigational capacity', which includes the knowledge and ability to negotiate a range of social spaces or envision the potential aspirational pathways.

Appadurai argues that 'the capacity to aspire', including the 'navigational capacity' and 'metacapacity', is more easily acquired by the wealthy because they have greater exposure to various experiences. The distribution of 'the capacity to aspire' is therefore uneven, and this creates inequities in access to resources for particular groups of people, especially the poor (Appadurai, 2004).

Appadurai states that 'the poor' have aspirations, but they have less opportunity to practice navigating social and cultural spaces. Less navigational practice then limits the capacity to make the necessary connections that enable them to change their own situation. According to Appadurai, it is therefore necessary to strengthen 'the capacity to aspire', to enable all individuals to have access to the resources that enable them the freedom to choose.

Appadurai proposes that one way to strengthen the capacity to aspire is to alter what he calls 'the terms of recognition'. The terms of recognition, he explains, are 'the terms of trade' or 'the terms of engagement' that occur within a particular cultural world or social space. He argues that poverty is related to having 'extremely weak resources' when it comes to the terms of recognition. Strengthening the capacity of the poor to aspire, he explains, may be achieved by increasing 'voice' and 'mobility' and through being recognised. Appadurai uses the example of social spaces that are already controlled by the minority, as being useful for exhibitions that showcase creativity and capabilities; allow individuals to explore and experience the possibilities; and allow for individuals to exercise voice in regard to their own conditions and needs.

Such spaces may be thought of as platforms for changing the terms of recognition and strengthening 'the capacity to aspire'. They are, arguably, what Appadurai (2004) frames as platforms for "practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture and refutation" which he argues 'the capacity to aspire' "thrives and survives on", as these influence navigational capacities and metacapacities (p. 69).

For Appadurai (2004), strengthening ‘the capacity to aspire’ is a strategy for addressing poverty, which he defines in the following way:

“Poverty is many things. All of them bad. It is material deprivation and desperation. It is lack of security and dignity. It is exposure to risk and high costs for thin comforts. It is inequality materialized. It diminishes its victims” (p. 64).

Strengthening ‘the capacity to aspire’, according to Appadurai (2004), better enables individuals to change their own conditions, as it increases their capacity to do something about their situation. Appadurai concludes that intervention requires an understanding of the rituals between the poor and the more powerful, so that ‘the terms of recognition’ may be altered. He argues that intervention also requires an endeavour to increase the navigational capacity of the poor to find their way through their ‘cultural map’ of aspirations, by exposure to ‘local teaching and learning’. It additionally requires efforts that increase the opportunities for those living in poverty to exercise voice in regard to their own situation and needs. And finally, any initiative, according to Appadurai, “should develop a set of tools for identifying the cultural map of aspirations that surround the specific intervention that is contemplated” (Appadurai, 2004, p. 83).

In conclusion, ‘the capacity to aspire’ is significantly influenced by exposure and access to a range of cultural, social and economic experiences, as well as aspects of culture such as norms, values and culturally diverse ideas about life. Strengthening this capacity, according to Appadurai (2004), requires exposure to the types of experiences that build on what a person is “able to do or be” (their metacapacities) and experiences that allow for an understanding of how to negotiate social contexts or understand potential pathways (their ‘navigational capacity’).

Social reproduction

Bourdieu’s (1973) theory of social reproduction and ‘cultural capital’ also acknowledges the role of culture and the socio-cultural setting on ‘capacity’ or access to resources. This access to resources then impacts on aspirations or the capacity to fulfil them. The notions of ‘field’ and ‘habitus’ and other forms of capital such as

‘social capital’ and ‘economic capital’ are also incorporated into this theory. These Bourdieuan concepts are closely related to Appadurai’s (2004) notion of the capacity to aspire, however, with a greater emphasis on social, cultural and economic experiences as being ‘class-based’ and generating ‘capital’, rather than ‘metacapacities’.

Social reproduction for Bourdieu (1973) is the reproduction of the “structure of class relations” (p. 71) to which educational systems contribute. According to Bourdieu (1973, 1986), educational systems reproduce the class inequalities that exist in society, as schools mostly recognise and reward the cultural capital of the dominant class. As a consequence of this, the dominant class arguably have a greater chance of success at school and fulfilling aspirations that require an educational qualification.

According to Bourdieu (1973), cultural capital “consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence” (p. 80), which is acquired through cultural experiences within the family. Bourdieu (1973) explains that these experiences are closely related to an individual’s social class. In short, cultural capital comprises class-based cultural experiences and knowledge, is acquired through the family, and is most valuable as a resource for school success when it reflects the culture of the dominant class (Bourdieu, 1973, 1986).

Another important concept originating from the work of Bourdieu is that of habitus. As is the case with cultural capital, habitus is related to social class, but refers more to an individual’s values, manners and preferences. Bourdieu (1990) refers to habitus as being acquired, stating that it is “a product of social conditionings and thus of history” (p. 116). In addition, Bourdieu (1993, as cited in Grenfell, 2008), implies that habitus may also be thought of as a type of capital. Habitus, when considered a type of capital in the form of class-based preferences and values, may influence both the capacity to fulfil aspirations and how aspirations are prioritised.

According to Bourdieu (1973), individuals may successfully navigate their way through a field (a particular social space or setting) if they have the necessary habitus and capital in which to do so. It is not only the cultural capital of the dominant class that therefore ensures success in the field of education, but class-based habitus as well. Bourdieu (1973), for example, argues that it is the habitus of the upper class, or

‘high society’, that enables exposure to practices that “are extremely profitable to the extent that they make possible the acquisition of the maximum yield of academic qualifications” (p. 98). This implies that habitus in itself can generate academic capital, which is a form of cultural capital. Therefore success at school is influenced by habitus, partially learned by practice in the field, as well as by capital, also acquired in the field, or in several different fields. In turn, success at school impacts on an individual’s capacity to fulfil their aspirations.

In addition to the importance of cultural capital, habitus and field, Bourdieu (1986) discusses how an individual’s access to opportunities and chances of success are influenced by the “structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time” (p. 242). The three main forms of capital (or power) that Bourdieu (1986) discusses are economic capital, cultural capital and social capital, all of which he proposes may be converted or transformed under certain conditions.

For Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital, habitus and field, together with other forms of capital such as social capital and economic capital, impact on an individual’s access to the resources required to fulfil their aspirations. As mentioned earlier, cultural capital, when most simply defined, refers to class-based cultural experiences and knowledge, which influence success at school in particular. Social capital and economic capital, however, need to be considered alongside cultural capital as they also influence access and opportunity.

Grenfell and James (1998) refer to social capital as “an individual or group’s sphere of contacts” (p. 20) and economic capital as “literally money wealth” (p. 20). Bourdieu places importance on how factors such as social class and family background factors influence access to resources or capital. It is the access to resources which then influences an individual’s capacity to fulfil their aspirations. In conclusion, the uneven distribution of capital, based on social class, favours the position of the wealthy and powerful in how it impacts on opportunities and school success. This then impacts on aspirations.

The theory of social reproduction has a disciplinary basis in sociology and it places importance on how factors such as social class and family background influence

access to resources or capital, which ultimately impact on an individual's capacity to fulfil their ambitions. This perspective places much less focus on individual traits and much more on social and cultural factors. It has been used as a framework in sociological career attainment research, or more recently, as a complementary framework to that of Appadurai for exploring adolescent life aspirations (see Bok, 2010).

Multiple worlds

Phelan et al.'s (1991) multiple worlds model around learning experiences and educational outcomes also sees aspirations as a cultural capacity. Phelan et al. (1991) argue that adolescent experiences within the multiple worlds of the school, family and peers impact on 'the self' and this impacts on educational outcomes. Educational outcomes then impact on the capacity that students have to fulfil certain school and work aspirations.

'Worlds' are defined by Phelan et al. (1991) to include "cultural knowledge and behavior" as well as "values and beliefs, expectations, actions, and emotional responses familiar to insiders" (p. 225). The community, family, school and peer worlds appear under the umbrella term 'multiple worlds', and these may or may not have their own distinctive differences (Phelan et al., 1991, p. 225). Phelan et al. (1991) suggest that 'multiple worlds' impact on 'the self', which includes "meanings, perceptions, understandings, thoughts, feelings and adaptation strategies" (p. 228). 'Adaptation strategies' include an individual's capacity to adapt to the school, family and peer worlds through adjusting to the different norms, traditions, and expectations that exist in these settings (Phelan et al., 1991). If students are able to adapt or transition more smoothly across the boundaries of the school world, family world and peer world, then their success at school is increased.

Phelan et al.'s concept of adaptation strategies is similar to Appadurai's (2004) 'navigational capacity' and Bourdieu's (1973) ideas around having the 'habitus' to negotiate different 'fields'. What Phelan et al. (1991) suggest, however, is that multiple worlds, and the experiences within these, not only shape this navigational tool but they also shape other aspects of 'the self' overall. For example, experiences in the school, family and peer worlds shape worldviews and identities. Phelan et al.

(1991) do not use the term worldview, but refer to perceptions, meanings, thoughts and understandings. These are arguably factors that come together to constitute worldviews. Phelan et al. (1991) also suggest that the ability to adapt to the norms, expectations, values, emotional responses and actions in a particular world also requires an adjustment to identity, so that this too matches the setting. According to Phelan et al., for example, students may successfully cross the borders of different worlds, but in doing so, “they are frequently forced to deny aspects of who they are” (p. 245). This suggests that ‘multiple worlds’ influence identities as well as worldviews. Phelan et al (1991), however, do not directly incorporate the term identity into their definition of ‘the self’ or their definition of ‘adaptation strategies’.

If multiple worlds influence ‘the self’, including adaptation strategies, and then academic achievement, they also indirectly impact on the capacity to fulfil certain educational aspirations.

A framework for exploring aspirations in-depth and in-context

Based on the emerging literature and the above-mentioned theories, in this study cultural worlds are seen to shape adolescent aspirations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, cultural worlds include the traditions, morals, expectations, values, beliefs, norms, habits, meanings, actions and understandings of a particular group of people (see Appadurai, 2004; Phelan et al., 1991). Cultural worlds are separated into the community, school, family and peer worlds (see Phelan et al., 1991). The way in which cultural worlds influence aspirations is seen to occur through two kinds of impact.

The first impact cultural worlds have on aspirations is through shaping aspects of ‘the self’, such as identity and worldview. The second impact that cultural worlds have on aspirations is through shaping ‘accumulated capacities’ and ‘accumulated capitals’. A diagram of the conceptual framework and a discussion are presented below.

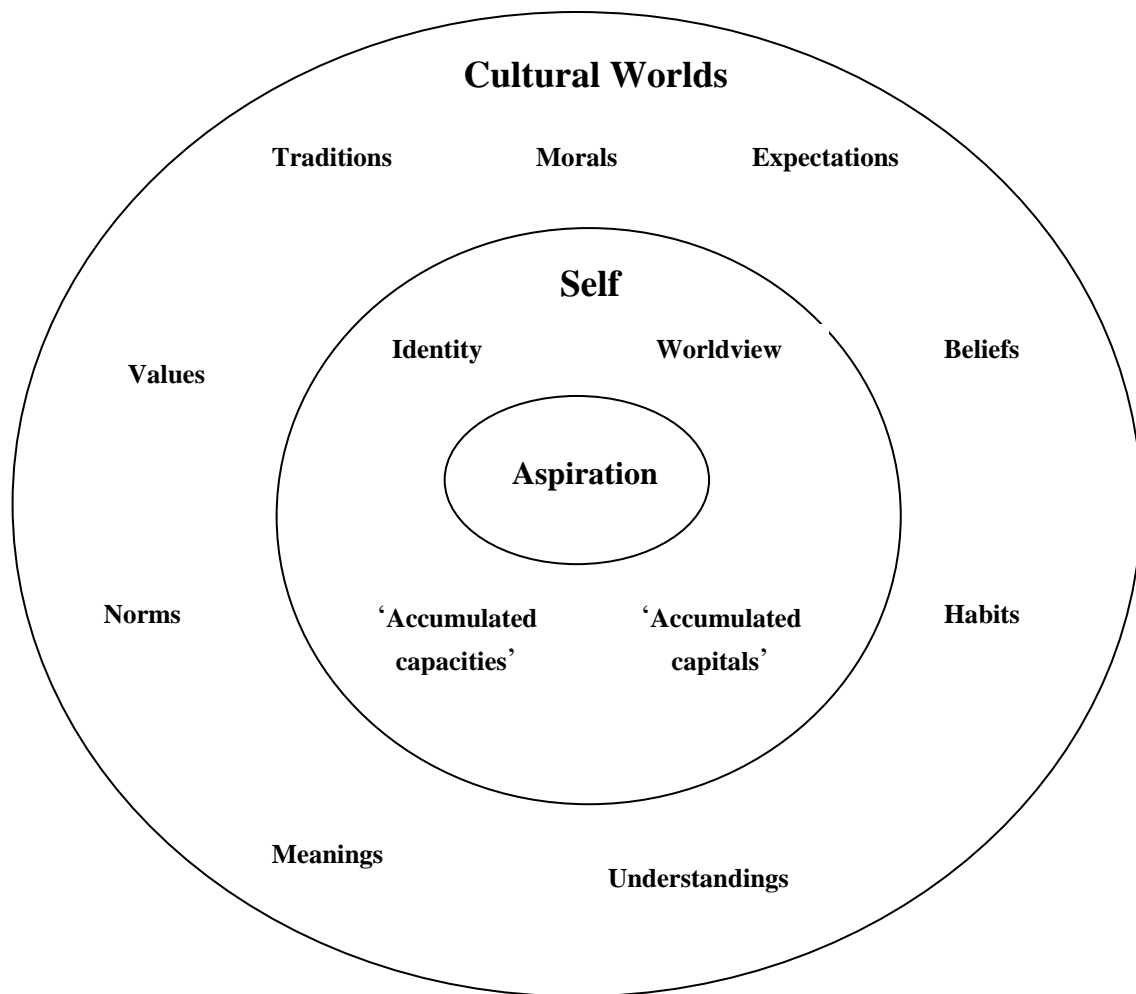


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Informed by Appadurai (2004), Bourdieu (1973) and Phelan et al. (1991)

Cultural worlds first shape aspirations via the impact they have on identity and worldview. Based largely on the work and ideas of Appadurai (2004), it is proposed that experiences within the broader socio-cultural setting shape worldviews. These worldviews include an individual's perceptions of the world and an individual's understandings about what is important and valuable in life. This broader system of understandings and beliefs about life are culturally informed and shape all aspirations. Worldviews are therefore one aspect of 'the self'. In this study, Bourdieu's (1986) habitus, in the form of class-based values and preferences, also constitutes part of one's worldview. Habitus impacts on what aspirations are seen by the individual as valuable as well as the way in which aspirations are prioritised. Phelan et al. (1991)

more specifically include “meanings, perceptions, understandings, thoughts, feelings and adaptation strategies” (p. 228) in their definition of ‘the self’; in this study these are viewed as factors that are also part of one’s worldview.

Further to this, Phelan et al. (1991) argue that it is necessary to make identity adjustments to have the ‘adaptation strategies’ required to move across the school, family and peer worlds more fluently. Students may therefore be required to hide parts of their true identity or selves to adapt to social settings in cases where these have different norms, traditions and understandings – or vary from what they are most familiar with (Phelan et al., 1991). This is interpreted by the author to mean that identity is socially and culturally shaped by various experiences within the peer, school and family worlds. Guided by Phelan et al. (1991), identity is therefore seen to be an aspect of ‘the self’ that is shaped by experiences within the broader socio-cultural setting (see also Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998). The author therefore proposes that cultural worlds shape identity or what an individual can see themselves doing or being, which then in turn shapes aspirations.

Cultural worlds therefore impact on both identity and worldview but also the capacity that an individual has to adapt to various social settings that may be different to what they are most familiar with. Identity and worldview, as aspects of the overall ‘self’, therefore shape aspirations. The ability to adapt worldviews and identities to different social settings also impacts on the probability of success at school, which may potentially influence the capacity to fulfil certain aspirations. This adaptation skill contains a navigational capacity and is a ‘resource’ that impacts on overall capacity; this is discussed below.

Cultural worlds not only shape aspirations through the impact that they have on identity and worldview but also through the impact that they have on ‘resources’. In this study, these ‘resources’ are the ‘accumulated capacities’ and the ‘accumulated capitals’ that individuals acquire in their cultural worlds. ‘Accumulated capacities’ include Appadurai’s notions of cultural capacity, metacapacity and navigational capacity, as discussed above. They therefore include the skills, knowledge and awareness of how to navigate a range of social contexts, including educational institutions. Further to this, ‘accumulated capacities’ include all that a person is “able to do or be”, in other words, their capacity set. In addition, the capacity to adjust to the

different norms, traditions, expectations and values that may be attributed to different social settings or worlds is also part of an individual's 'accumulated capacities' (Phelan et al., 1991).

'Accumulated capitals' include Bourdieu's 'cultural capital', 'social capital', 'economic capital' and 'habitus', as well as other capitals or knowledge that an individual may have. Other types of knowledge include tacit knowledge gained through experiences that are not necessarily class-based. Cultural worlds therefore impact on an individual's accumulated capacities and capitals. These accumulated resources may then be used to access opportunities – including educational opportunities. Cultural worlds influence aspirations as they influence access to the resources that an individual may need to fulfil their aspirations.

The conceptual framework for this study is guided by an emerging trend and need to further explore culture in aspirations research. The framework and emerging focus is towards further exploring the socio-cultural setting and how this shapes adolescent aspirations or the capacity to fulfil these. The following section therefore details what is known about the structural, social and cultural influences on aspirations. As there is a concentration of aspirations research in the contexts of higher education and the workforce, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the following section begins with research that explores school and work aspirations.

Educational and occupational aspirations

Social class, socio-economic status and the related 'resources'

Despite some differing perspectives and conflicting findings, the literature shows that schooling experiences, participation in education, adolescent aspirations or the 'choices' that adolescents ultimately make, are largely impacted on by social class and socio-economic status. In this review of the literature the terminology changes between 'social class' and 'socio-economic status' depending on where the study was conducted or what term the researchers use. According to Rojewski (2005), research shows that individuals with a higher socio-economic status typically aspire to higher educational qualifications and occupations that are considered more prestigious. On the other hand, it has been argued that 'the poor' or 'low SES students' do have

aspirations, including aspirations for higher education, but they may not necessarily have the ‘resources’ or the capacity to pursue them (e.g. Bok, 2010; Bowden & Doughney, 2010; Gale, 2010; Prosser et al., 2008; Smith, 2011; St Clair & Benjamin, 2011). These ‘resources’ are typically those associated with class-based economic, social, and cultural experiences, as well as learning experiences, and are discussed shortly.

Transitions research conducted in the United Kingdom also demonstrates that social class impacts on aspirations; however, in this literature the terms ‘choices’ or ‘life chances’ are used more than the term ‘aspirations’. This research illustrates that eventual ‘choices’ surrounding work and education are highly dependent on social class (e.g. Ball, Reay & David, 2002; Furlong, 1986; Furlong & Biggart, 1999; Griffin, 1985; Jones, et al., 2004; Reay, 2004, 2009; Reay & Lucey, 2003; Thompson et al., 2002; Winterton & Irwin, 2012). The above literature demonstrates, in the main, that higher education is more accessible to the middle class in the UK than it is to the working class and choice is really only for those who can “afford to choose” (Reay & Lucey, 2003, p. 138). From this perspective, social class impacts on access to higher education, and not having this access can impact on ‘choice’. So, theoretically, even if they have higher education aspirations, working class young people may not have the economic resources to act on these aspirations.

There are, however, other class-based ‘resources’ that impact on choices and the capacity to fulfil aspirations outside of economic capital. Aspirations may be influenced by experiences within the family world that are interconnected with social class. The author reviews the more recent research that details how social class impacts on ‘resources’ and the capacity that adolescents may have to fulfil their aspirations.

Research demonstrates that students who are traditionally under-represented in higher education, including students from low socio-economic backgrounds, do have aspirations for higher education; however, they are less likely to have a family tradition of higher education and therefore a more limited knowledge of how to successfully navigate these institutions through direct experience (e.g. Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010; Smith, 2011; Winterton & Irwin, 2012). These ‘intergenerational experiences’, or family traditions, impact on the capacity to fulfil aspirations for

higher education as they either make the tertiary pathway easier or more difficult to navigate (see Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010; Smith, 2011; Winterton & Irwin, 2012). Students from low socio-economic backgrounds, for example, have less exposure and experience in a range of settings, including educational settings, and hence more limited knowledge of how to navigate these (Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010; Smith, 2011). This impacts on their capacity to navigate their way through educational institutions; to understand different pathways; and to see how achieving one aspiration may be connected to achieving another (Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010). Further to this, and drawing on Ball and Vincent (1998), Bok (2010) argues that students from low socio-economic backgrounds have limited access to the necessary ‘hot knowledge’ required to act on aspirations for higher education. ‘Hot knowledge’ is the kind of information necessary to navigate the road to higher education that is usually gained through family experience, but also through social networks (see Ball & Vincent, 1998; Bok, 2010).

This navigational experience and access to ‘hot knowledge’ is one example of a ‘resource’ that is associated with social class, and one that has recently been explored in educational research by drawing on Appadurai’s (2004) ‘capacity to aspire’ and Bourdieu’s (1973, 1986) notions of experience in ‘the field’, ‘cultural capital’ and ‘habitus’ (e.g. Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010; Smith, 2011). What the above-mentioned research highlights, is that family traditions of higher education act as a navigational resource (navigational capacity), that is typically class-based, which impacts on the capacity students have to fulfil their aspirations. It also highlights that class-based knowledge and experiences (cultural capital) and class-based networks (social capital) are also ‘resources’ that impact on the capacity to fulfil certain aspirations as they influence success at school. These are therefore briefly discussed below.

Educational research illustrates that cultural capital is a navigational resource but it also impacts on success at school, on educational and occupational outcomes, and aspirations in other ways (e.g. Archer & Hutchings, 2000; Ball, Davies, David & Reay, 2002; Bettie, 2002; Brooks, 2004; De Graaf, De Graaf & Kraaykamp, 2000; Dimaggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Wieninger, 2003; McLean & Holden, 2004; Nobel & Davies, 2009; Prosser et al., 2008; Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003; Sullivan, 2001; Wu, 2008). This literature explores the various

class-based knowledge and experiences that are typically associated with success in school, or stated as being required for success in higher education. These include, for example, knowledge of educational systems; role models in the family who have experience of higher education or who are employed in less traditional occupations; higher levels of parental engagement, participation and interaction with the school; specific family cultural resources such as educational resources in the home; certain family cultural practices such as the father's level of engagement with various types of literature and the arts; higher parental occupational and educational status; high levels of parental engagement in educational activities with their children; 'embodied' or internalised cultural practices and beliefs that present as attitudes, values and preferences; and other parental cultural practices related to engaging in a range of different experiences largely associated with the arts and education (e.g. Archer & Hutchings, 2000; Ball, Davies, David & Reay, 2002; Bettie, 2002; Brooks, 2004; De Graaf, De Graaf & Kraaykamp, 2000; Dimaggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Wieninger, 2003; McLean & Holden, 2004; Nobel & Davies, 2009; Prosser et al., 2008; Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003; Reay et al., 2005; Wu, 2008).

In the main, the research above reflects Bourdieu's (1973, 1986) propositions, as it demonstrates that cultural capital (class-based experiences and knowledge), as well as habitus (internalised class-based preferences and manners), impacts on schooling experiences and educational attainment. Both of these impact on the capacity to fulfil certain aspirations that require specific educational qualifications. This disadvantages students from working class or low socio-economic backgrounds as these students have the type of cultural capital that is generally not recognised or rewarded in schools (Bourdieu, 1973, 1986). Cultural capital impacts on success at school (Bourdieu, 1973, 1986), so it is a 'resource' that impacts on a student's capacity to fulfil certain aspirations, and this is also associated with social class.

More recent research that explores student aspirations and different approaches to middle schooling highlights another 'resource' connected with cultural capital and social class that impacts on aspirations or the capacity to fulfil them (see Prosser et al., 2008). This 'resource', according to Prosser et al. (2008), includes the different types of knowledge ('funds of knowledge'), including cultural capital, that students bring into the classroom in their 'virtual schoolbags' (see also Moll, Armanti & Gonzalez,

1992; Thompson, 2002). Prosser et al. (2008) argue that schools need to recognise the different ‘types of knowledge’ and ‘build learner identities’ to ensure success at school. These ‘different types of knowledge’ and ‘cultural capital’ are therefore also a ‘resource’ that impacts on students’ capacity to fulfil their aspirations, and one that is class-based.

Another way in which cultural capital, as a component of social class, influences educational choices, is through the impact it has on a student’s ability to identify with the school setting (e.g. Archer & Hutchings, 2000; Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Archer et al., 2007; Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003). Research demonstrates that working class students experience feelings of not belonging in educational settings and not identifying with the school world, which then negatively impacts on their desire to participate in higher education (e.g. Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Archer et al., 2007). These feelings of not belonging initially stem from not having the type of cultural capital that is recognised and rewarded in the school world. This is indirectly another class-based ‘resource’ that enables success at school only for those who feel they belong (Bourdieu, 1973).

Another of Bourdieu’s (1973, 1986) components of family background, ‘social capital’ (social networks/relationships) has also been extensively researched in relation to success at school, ‘choices’ and aspirations (e.g. Abbott-Chapman & Kilpatrick, 2001; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Brooks, 2004; Coleman, 1988; Croll, 2004; Gilles & Lucey, 2006; Holland et al., 2007; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002). Social capital is viewed as a complex term by many researchers and definitions vary in the literature, depending on disciplinary background or interpretation. According to Kilpatrick, Field and Falk (2003):

“There is broad agreement that social capital is a resource based on relationships among people. In particular, most definitions focus on membership in networks and the norms that guide their interactions. These in turn generate secondary features such as knowledge and trust, which then facilitate reciprocity and cooperation.” (p. 419)

This literature review focuses on social capital in relation to aspirations or ‘choices’. In relation to aspirations, Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman (2002) found that:

“Family social capital, and to a lesser extent school/community social capital influence young people’s future aspirations, but more significantly, their social capital influences current work/study priorities.” (p. 63)

Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman (2002) argue that the nature of family networks and associated knowledge in rural areas is usually more compatible with what is required for securing work locally, than it is with what is required to continue on to post-compulsory education. Families transmit their ‘incomplete understanding’ of educational institutions and work opportunities outside the local context to their children and this typically influences their decision-making (Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2001). Brooks (2004) also explores higher education ‘choices’ and reports that the father’s knowledge of educational systems and markets has an influence on the educational decision-making of their children and that this knowledge derives from experiences at work. This suggests that social networks provide the necessary knowledge of higher education markets. Other research also demonstrates that information, in the form of ‘hot knowledge’ that is transmitted through social networks or ‘the grapevine’ regarding higher education institutions and systems, also impacts on school choices and participation in higher education (e.g. Ball & Vincent, 1998; Bok, 2010; Smith, 2011).

Further to this, Holland et al. (2007) found that children and adolescents produce and use social capital when negotiating transitions and identities, and suggest that the strength of networks is a valuable resource for both school adjustment and social mobility. This is supported by earlier research by Coleman (1988) that demonstrates how family and community social capital reduces the possibility of early school leaving, which has the potential to influence the capacity to fulfil aspirations. As social capital is class-based, this also demonstrates that social class influences schooling experiences and mobility. Social capital is therefore a ‘resource’ in the form of networks that are associated with social status. It impacts on educational outcomes and the capacity to fulfil certain educational and occupational aspirations.

It is important to note here that in the UK transitions literature, social class is also seen to include cultural understandings and cultural practices more broadly. In the UK context, for example, social class and culture are viewed as one and the same or ‘enmeshed’ (e.g. Jones et al., 2004; Reay, 2005). For example, Jones et al. (2004)

refer to “class culture” and connect norms and traditions with social class. They argue that school-to-work transitions are influenced by “normative social-class patterns” and provide evidence of “intergenerational social-class reproduction” (Jones et al., 2004, p. 223). Jones et al. (2004) report that the working class, including the affluent working class, embark on traditional routes into the workforce and hope to secure financial independence; whereas the middle class opt for educational pathways with financial support from their parents. Jones et al. (2004) report that less parental financial support and “a class culture of self-sufficiency through work” (p. 224) reinforced working class pathways into work. A working class ‘culture of self-sufficiency’ and direct workforce pathway, including for affluent working class young people, demonstrates a value for work over education even in cases where there is economic capital.

According to Reay (2005) social class is not only tied to culture but it is also internalised:

“...I argue that there is a powerful dynamic between emotions, the psyche and class inequalities that is as much about the makings of class as it is about its consequences. In contemporary British society social class is not only etched into our culture, it is still deeply etched into our psyches, despite class awareness and class consciousness being seen as ‘a thing of the past’.” (Reay, 2005, p. 911)

What this perspective suggests is that social class influences culture, emotions and psychological processes. It further suggests that when the UK researchers report on social class they are including certain aspects of culture in terms of traditions, norms or beliefs which have been connected to the working class or middle class and are internalised. This is not dissimilar to Bourdieu’s notion of habitus (class-based values, attitudes and preferences). In connection with cultural capital, habitus has also been found to influence participation in higher education and ‘choices’ in recent research, largely through its impact on identity or the ability to identify with educational spaces (e.g. Aries & Seider, 2005; Lehmann, 2007; Reay, 1997; Walpole, 2003).

Reay (1998) connects identity with social class and later proposes that the emotional aspects of class include “feelings of ambivalence, inferiority and superiority, visceral

aversions, recognition, abjection and the markings of taste” (Reay, 2005, p. 911). In the UK context, “class culture” and “class consciousness” are therefore tied up in the way social class is viewed, as a complex structure of various ‘capitals’ or habitus, culture, emotion and identity.

The above overview highlights the key ways in which social class impacts on transitions, participation, choices and aspirations. It demonstrates that social class impacts on ‘resources’ such as the navigational capacity and knowledge required to successfully navigate social spaces, including educational settings; the cultural capital and social capital required for success at school; the capacity to identify with educational institutions and the desire to engage with these; the economic capital to ‘afford to choose’; and the emotional capacity attached to class consciousness that arguably enables engagement in higher education or fulfilment of certain aspirations. The research presented above demonstrates a current concentration on how economic, social and cultural ‘resources’ attached to social class influence the capacity to fulfil aspirations and make choices. This illustrates a trend towards further exploring how multiple cultural factors are interconnected with socio-economic status or social class to gain a deeper contextual understanding of adolescent aspirations.

Gender

Research that explores the influence of gender on aspirations is cross-disciplinary and located across a range of literatures, including the sociology of education and work literatures, the anthropology of education literature, the feminist and work/life balance literatures and the vocational behaviour literature. This research is relevant to this study which comprises a cohort of adolescent girls. Research highlights the interactions between gender and aspects of culture such as traditions and expectations.

The literature shows that females generally aspire to occupations that are traditionally gender-specific (Furlong & Biggart, 1999; Hoffnung, 2004; Patton & Creed, 2007; Rainey & Borders, 1997) and typically occupy jobs such as teaching, nursing, childcare, librarianship and administrative work (see Battle & Wigfield, 2005; Furlong & Biggart, 1999; Hoffnung, 2004). Battle and Wigfield (2005) connect this trend with the tendency for females to “conform to female cultural stereotypes” (p. 57) and Evans and Diekmann (2009) suggest that the division of labour is connected to

“one’s gender belief system” (p. 248) and the “internalization of gender roles” (p. 248). Charles and Harris (2007) argue that gendered expectations are likely to stem from cultural influences such as stereotypes and understandings of appropriate or ‘normal’ social roles. If females are more likely to conform than males, as Bettie (2002) suggests, they are arguably more likely to aspire to traditionally acceptable, or culturally ‘normal’ roles.

In terms of the influence of others on female aspirations, research suggests that individuals within the family world have a significant impact. According to Furlong (1986), “The single most important influence on the occupational aspirations of young women is that of their mother and female friends and relations” (p. 375). Furlong (1986) further reports that role models within the family have a powerful influence on female career pathways. Other research has also found that mothers are the most influential person when it comes to post-school planning and decision-making (see Brooks, 2004; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002). Additionally, O’Brien and Fassinger (1993) report that aspects of the mother-daughter relationship are influential in the career development process. Rainey and Borders (1997) explored this further and report that the “mother’s education, work experience, personality characteristics, and gender role attitudes” (p. 170) have an influence on their daughters’ decision-making in the middle school years. The literature demonstrates that the role of females, particularly the mother, is therefore a vital one in shaping aspirations and decision-making.

Despite gender, research demonstrates that the strength of interpersonal influences, such as norms, parental expectations and support, has a significant impact on adolescent thoughts and behaviours (e.g. Bryce & Anderson, 2008; Buchman & Dalton, 2002; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Nurmi 2004, as cited in Beal & Crockett, 2010). This research is presented in a later section of the literature review that discusses the influence of family background factors.

The topic of aspirations also features in the work/life balance and feminist literatures. Although career aspirations or workforce participation are the focus, some of this research explores aspirations outside of the contexts of higher education and the workforce. According to Hoffnung (2004) women are more likely to choose female dominated careers as these accommodate for the work/family life balance. Similar

findings have been reported by Looker and Magee (2000, as cited in Sikora & Saha, 2009), who argue that adolescent women alter their career plans based on their knowledge of the responsibilities they will have as mothers in the future.

Other research reports differences in what females aspire to and the actual occupation they eventually obtain, with researchers arguing that this may be due to the women opting for more flexible, part-time work that allows for work-family balance (Cartwright, 2004). In their study of the aspirations of Australian women, Johnson and Lee (2009) report that the majority surveyed aspired for a combination of motherhood, paid part-time work and relationships. Similarly, Hoffnung (2004) reports a similar trend amongst college women in New England, with the majority holding high expectations and aspirations to have a career, marriage and motherhood. These studies suggest females aspire to motherhood, relationships and careers; however, compromises are made to occupational aspirations to accommodate balance/fulfilment of all. In addition to this, Pocock (2005), who explores the aspirations of an adolescent cohort in the Australian context, predicts a similar compromise situation for females. Pocock reports that the participants (10-12 years and 16-18 years) expressed aspirations for work, children and relationships, following the completion of their education. On analysis of the findings, however, Pocock suggests that females are likely to have to sacrifice work and employment status and security to accommodate caring for children, despite their aspirations to combine work, motherhood and relationships.

Hakim's (2006) controversial theory on lifestyle preferences also contributes to appears in the work/life debate, claiming that social class is less important in influencing aspirations or 'choices' surrounding careers than motivation, personal life goals, attitudes and values. This theory has received considerable criticism, however, for placing an emphasis on women actually having a choice, despite structural and external forces such as policies and labour market characteristics, which have been shown to play a significant role in influencing work/life decision-making (see Cartwright, 2004; Everingham et al., 2007; Gray & Stanton, 2002; Pocock, 2005; Warner-Smith & Imbruglia, 2001). Closely-related debates over the rise in individualism appear in the sociology and feminist literatures which criticise the newly emerging belief that all individuals have choices, despite social constraints, and

that achievement is due to ability, drive, hard work, or even fate (e.g. Charles & Harris, 2007; Crompton, 2002; Everingham et al., 2007; Harris, 2002). The emphasis is on the internal and personal attributes of individuals, rather than societal or environmental barriers, as having the most impact on goal setting and attainment.

Debate also exists around the current generation of young women having more opportunities and choices in life, but higher expectations in terms of career and family. According to Everingham et al. (2007), the feminists behind the women's movement opened doors for all women; however, the current generation are now expressing some resentment, as there are higher expectations now to pursue both a career and motherhood. These debates have sparked conversations around how role expectations and gender constraints are impacting differently on the overall life choices for females (see Everingham et al., 2007; Harris, 2002). Possibly as a result of this expectation, Everingham et al. (2007) found that the majority of young women in their study expected to work as well as be a mother, and did not consider the roles as separate, 'but enmeshed', despite their socio-economic status. Everingham et al. (2007) also report that "the view that staying at home to care for young children was 'a luxury' was widespread amongst the women we interviewed across all social groups" (p. 433).

This demonstrates that despite socio-economic status, most females believe that working and mothering roles go hand in hand, which suggests that gender role expectations around motherhood and work are not necessarily class-based. Socio-economic status or social class, however, has been shown to influence the type of work females expect to engage with. Higginbotham (1992), for example, found that females from working class families typically only pursue the education they require to work in gender-specific occupations.

These findings provide some evidence to support O'Brien and Fassinger's (1993) claim that the career development process is much more complicated for females, with complex interactions between factors. In addition to this, Harris (2002) suggests that more comprehensive and contextual aspirations research is needed, stating:

“It is important that both research and policy directions take into account the diversity of young women’s circumstances and experiences, as well as the contradictions and ambivalences in their lives.” (p. 36)

Further to this, Harris (2004) discusses the challenges that young women are confronted with that are associated with the ‘neoliberal narratives of choice’ and argues that “we are well overdue for a relevant framework of growing up for young people in new times” (p. 189). This extends on Dwyer and Wyn’s argument (2001, p. 204) that it is necessary to find ways to explore “the complexity and ambiguity of transition in post industrial society” (as cited in Harris, 2004, p. 189).

Additionally, Cartwright (2004) draws attention to how past research has explained women’s participation in the workforce through analysing preferences for work and family, but there has been no real exploration of their ‘lived-experiences’. According to Cartwright (2004) we need to consider “women’s decision-making in terms of examining ‘lived-experiences’ (including opportunities, constraints and choices) as well as preferences for combining paid work and family after childbirth” (p. 38). Cartwright (2004) emphasises the fact that women’s decision-making is dynamic in nature and requires an approach which recognises this and which is based on qualitative research as well as quantitative research.

The overview of the literature on gender demonstrates a need to consider the impact of a variety of factors on aspirations and decision-making. Some of these include cultural factors such as traditions, expectations and stereotypes; structural factors such as balancing work and family life; current social changes such as the rise in individualism and the expectations of women in society today; and family world influences such as the role of other female relations and the strength of interpersonal relationships. The literature above illustrates that many factors are interwoven with gender to shape aspirations; it demonstrates a need for research that further explores the complexity of women’s lives, their circumstances and their lived experiences.

Rurality

The literature overviewed in this section is on rurality and how this impacts on aspirations and participation in higher education. This is largely in the Australian

context, as this is where there is a concentration of the research on these interconnected topics. As is the case with socio-economic status, there have been some conflicting findings regarding the influence of rurality on aspirations. Research demonstrates that rurality has a significant influence on aspirations (e.g. Andres & Looker, 2001; Apostol & Bilden, 1991; James et al., 1999; Rojewski, 2005; Warner-Smith & Lee, 2001); however, there have been conflicting findings surrounding the nature of the influence.

For example, Rojewski (1995) suggests rural young people are more likely to have lower occupational aspirations and expectations due to limited resources and school experiences, whereas other research with this cohort reports on high aspirations (e.g. Alloway, Dalley, Patterson, Walker & Lenoy, 2004a; Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert, & Muspratt, 2004b; Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; Apostol & Bilden, 1991; Dalley-Trim & Alloway, 2010). Research therefore suggests that young people in rural settings do not have low aspirations, but rather they have limited access to the resources and experiences they need to fulfil certain aspirations, such as those for higher education (e.g. Alloway et al., 2004a; Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; Dalley-Trim & Alloway, 2010; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002).

Participation rates in higher education are lower for young people in rural communities (Bradley et al., 2008; Marks et al., 2000) and as the level of remoteness increases, the likelihood of completing Year 12 decreases (Australian Social Trends, 2003). Research also reports lower completion rates for secondary education for those students who are from rural areas (James et al., 1999; Lamb, Dwyer & Wyn, 2000, as cited in Abbott-Chapman, 2001). Low participation rates in rural areas may be partially attributed to the inability of rural young people to access post Year 10 compulsory education and training without leaving their hometowns (Alston & Kent, 2003; Apostol & Bilden, 1991; Australian Social Trends, 2008). This means that many rural young people have to manage the psychological stress of leaving family and friends to complete their college education (Abbott-Chapman & Kilpatrick, 2001; Alloway et al., 2004a; James et al., 1999), as well as manage the additional financial burdens associated with relocating for school (Alston & Kent, 2003, Alloway et al., 2004a; Apostol & Bilden, 1991). Prior to leaving home for higher education, rural

students have experienced narrower school curricula and had limited exposure to the range of possible occupations and role models (Apostal & Bilden, 1991).

In addition to access and equity factors, cultural factors also influence lower participation and completion rates for rural students. Research in Australia, for example, has shown that family values, attitudes and beliefs influence aspirations and/or participation in education (Abbott-Chapman, 2001; Alloway et al., 2004a; James et al., 1999; Kilpatrick, Abbott-Chapman & Baynes, 2002). James et al. (1999) report that if the family and community value higher education and are aware of the options, this increases the likelihood of aspiring for and participating in higher education. Studies also report that parents in rural areas may have doubts about the value of further education (Alloway et al., 2004a; James et al., 1999) and that attitudes towards education may be negative in some rural communities (Kenyon, Sercombe, Black & Lhuede, 2001, as cited in Alloway et al., 2004a). In addition, research demonstrates that family networks may prefer to see rural young people secure a job locally rather than move away for school (Alloway et al., 2004a). This may be related to findings by Abbott-Chapman (2001) that illustrate that leaving home was a particular concern for parents with daughters. Findings by Abbott-Chapman and Kilpatrick (2001) also demonstrate that family background and cultural factors, impact on participation in rural areas:

“The continuing influence of parents and family on post-school choices is very strong, and is emphasised by the close-knit networks of the communities in which the students live.” (p. 44)

Findings from research by Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2009) illustrate a relationship between rurality and culture, but also gender:

“For many young men and women in rural communities, it is difficult to construct aspirations and expectations that can move beyond the gendered culture of the communities within which they live.” (p. 52)

These conflicting research findings raise some questions about how cultural factors interact with gender and rurality to influence aspirations and then educational decision-making. It highlights an area for further research that explores the

interactions between multiple factors including gender, rurality and culture, and how this impacts on aspirations and participation in higher education.

Australian research reports that young rural women, in contrast to young urban women, are typically spending fewer years in education, have aspirations for more traditional occupations, and are marrying younger and having children earlier (Warner-Smith & Lee, 2001). This illustrates how rurality influences decisions and actions and how traditions and gender may interact with rurality to influence participation in education and career aspirations.

However, more recent research by Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2010) demonstrates that rural young people do have aspirations for higher education and aspirations to leave their hometowns to fulfil these educational goals. Other recent research by Easthorpe and Gabriel (2008) illustrates a “culture of migration” (p. 172) that exists in rural areas which sees young people leaving home to fulfil their aspirations for school and work. Youth migration research by Corbett (2007), in the Canadian context, also demonstrates how rurality impacts on decisions to leave home in the hope of securing educational qualifications and upward mobility. Corbett (2007) illustrates the interconnections between changing social and economic conditions, rurality and culture and how these impact on decision-making to leave. Longitudinal youth transitions research in Australia reports similar findings in regards to how life choices surrounding education, family and employment are impacted on by rurality and the changing social, economic and political climate (see Cuervo & Wyn, 2012). According to Cuervo and Wyn (2012), however, the young people in their study were considering formal education as a way of securing employment locally. These findings may arguably be related to the strong sense of ‘belonging’ that the participants had to their rural communities (see Cuervo & Wyn, 2012). Despite the contrast in reasoning behind desires to obtain higher education qualifications as outlined above, these studies suggest a need for future research with rural adolescents to consider the impacts of culture on youth migration as well as how changing social, political and economic conditions shape transitions and decision-making.

The research on rurality highlights that young people in rural areas do have aspirations to leave their hometowns for higher education, but they also have aspirations to remain at home. It highlights that the low participation rates in higher

education in rural areas are associated with numerous factors including the psychological, emotional and financial costs of leaving home. In addition, it appears that low participation rates in higher education may also be a reflection of the prioritisation of aspirations to remain near family and friends.

The above literature surrounding aspirations and participation illustrates the impact of rurality and suggests that interconnections between cultural factors and other factors, such as gender, exist and may combine to influence aspirations. These interconnections, when combined with social class, socio-economic status and a range of family background factors, impact heavily on access to opportunities and the capacity to fulfil future goals. This illustrates a need to further explore the impact of rurality on adolescent aspirations and to do so in connection with multiple other influencing factors, including culture, gender and significant others within the family world.

Family background factors

Individuals within the family world have a powerful impact on the educational decision-making of young people. This impact is not necessarily only in relation to aspirations or the prioritisation of these (e.g. Abbott-Chapman, 2000; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1998; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002) but also on educational attainment, career choices and post-school transitions more broadly (see Beal & Crockett, 2010; Bettie, 2002; Bryce et al., 2008; Forskett & Helmsely-Brown, 2001; Furlong & Biggart, 1986; Marjoribanks, 2002, 2005; McLean & Holden, 2004; Nurmi, 2004; Patton & McMahon, 1999).

In the American context, Bettie (2002) illustrates how the likelihood of participation in college and success at school was increased in cases where the female participants had an older sister who had attended college. Bettie (2002) associates this with the inter-generational transmission of cultural capital and also economic capital (Bettie, 2002). McLean and Holden's (2004) research in Australia also highlights how the chances of success at university were increased for those students with parents, siblings, friends or other relatives who had taken that pathway; and, that this was largely through the transmission of cultural capital. The literature on social class and socio-economic status presented earlier in this chapter provides a clearer picture of

how family experiences or traditions of higher education strengthen the capacity to fulfil aspirations for university (e.g. Ball & Vincent, 1998, Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010; Smith, 2011; Winterton & Irwin, 2012).

Research by Nurmi (2004, as cited in Beal & Crockett, 2010) found that adolescents base their futures around norms and parental expectations. Bryce and Anderson (2008) state that families play a significant role in the career decision-making of young people. In addition to these findings, Buchman and Dalton's (2002) study of interpersonal influences and educational aspirations, which included research conducted in 12 countries, found parents to be significantly influential in decision-making. Other research reports that parental expectations have a significant impact on the development of aspirations and/or plans to participate in education (e.g. Hossler et al., 1998; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Winterton & Irwin, 2012). Winterton and Irwin (2012), for example, found that parental expectations influence teenage plans for college, and these expectations are connected to other factors such as social class, the school, teachers, friends and circumstances.

Research has also explored the influence of ethnicity/race on aspirations, with Kao (2000) reporting that adolescent goals may be linked to the stereotypes which are "attached to their ethnic group" (p. 407). Research has reported difficulty in separating ethnicity from socio-economic status in particular, and there have been conflicting results, with some arguing there are no racial differences and some reporting that those from ethnic backgrounds aspire to lower prestige occupations (see Rojewski, 2005).

Epps (1995) argues that further research into how race and class interact to influence aspirations is "very much needed to facilitate understanding of a very complex set of issues" (p. 604). Hubbard's (1999) research with predominantly low-income African-American high school students explored the interactions between class, race and gender. The students in the study reported having aspirations for college, but expressed concerns about how they would pay for a college education. Kerpelman et al. (2002) who conducted a study with African-American females, also reported financial costs as a barrier for some participants, despite these young women having college aspirations. These could be seen as examples of how the influence of class overrides that of ethnic background. In saying this, however, Hubbard (1999) argues

that gender in particular, as well as family support and other factors, comes into play, and calls for additional research into lived experiences within the realms of the family, community and school.

The research outlined above demonstrates that individuals within the family world, together with certain norms, traditions and expectations, impact on adolescent aspirations or decision-making. It illustrates that uncertainties remain surrounding the impact of ethnicity and how this interacts with other factors to influence aspirations. It highlights a need for future research that explores how family background factors, including cultural traditions, norms, expectations, attitudes and understandings, interact with social class, gender and ethnicity. Understanding these interactions requires research approaches that capture lived experiences in the broader socio-cultural context.

Identity and ‘the self’

Research demonstrates that adolescence is a critical time for career decision-making or compromise (Armstrong & Crombie, 2000; Erikson, 1968; Gottfredson, 1981; Sirin et al., 2004; Super, 1990); identity construction (see Erikson, 1968; Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998; Sanders & Munford, 2008); and the forming of worldviews (see Beare, 2001). According to Erikson (1968), adolescence is “almost a way of life between childhood and adulthood” (p. 128) and a peak time for both identity construction and role confusion. Erikson (1968) argues that young people at this time are most concerned with their occupational identity. Additionally, during the period of adolescence, young people are likely to be most disturbed by not being able to decide what career they want to pursue (Erikson, 1968). Research also demonstrates that adolescence is a time for young people to discover who they are and who they want to become and this plight may be associated with wanting to engage in ‘identity work’ (see Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998).

Hemmings (2006) refers to ‘identity work’ as “an attempt to form and project a true and enduring self” (p. 133). Both Hemmings (2006) and Hoffman (1998) argue that ‘identity work’ or developing the ‘enduring self’ is a complex ‘psychocultural’ process. ‘Identity work’ is therefore seen in this study as a cultural and psychological process of making sense of the ‘enduring self’ through engaging in experiences.

‘The self’ or the ‘enduring self’ is defined by Hoffman (1998) as,

“A culturally patterned way of relating to others; to the material, natural and spiritual worlds; and to time and space, including notions of agency, mind, person, being and spirit.” (p. 328)

‘The self’ may also be seen to include “meanings, perceptions, understandings, thoughts, feelings and adaptation strategies” (Phelan et al., 1991 p. 228). ‘Adaptation strategies’ consist of an individual’s capacity to adapt to the school, family and peer worlds through adjusting to the different norms, traditions and expectations that exist in these settings (Phelan et al., 1991). Hoffman (1998) argues that ‘the self’ interacts with socio-cultural experiences and structures to negotiate or produce identities, stating that identities “reflect the self’s situatedness in social roles” (p. 326). From this viewpoint, identity is shaped by ‘sociocultural categories’ and experiences and is therefore socially and culturally constructed. As is the case with Hemmings (2006) and Hoffman (1998), Hattam and Smyth (2003) also frame identity as a component of ‘the self’ which is shaped through experience. According to Hattam and Smyth (2003), identity is socially constructed and a complex process of making sense of who you are and who you want to be. Other research also illustrates that particular individuals, social interaction or exposure to experiences more generally have a significant influence on identity formation, particularly during adolescence (e.g. Biddle, Bank & Slavings, 1987; Kerpelman et al., 2002; Nakkula, 2004). According to Nakkula (2004):

“Adolescents’ everyday experiences of family, friends, and school arguably carry the most weight for ongoing identity development.” (p. 15)

The above literature frames the culturally constructed ‘self’ to include identity, as well as worldview – perceptions, understandings, meanings, thoughts and feelings. According to Beare (2001), “Every human being on earth has a world-view and a set of beliefs” (p. 18). Beliefs and values form a large part of how an individual views the world, which then guides how they think, behave and live their life (Beare, 2001). According to the literature above, worldviews and identities are viewed as part of ‘the self’ which are shaped through experiences. Depending on the disciplinary perspective, however, identity may not be seen as socially and culturally constructed.

It is therefore important to note that in this study, identity construction is perceived as a cultural and psychological process of making sense of the ‘enduring self’ through engaging in a range of experiences within the social setting (see Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998).

Research involving adolescents demonstrates that factors such as identity and ‘the self’ are not only shaped by culture, but impact on success at school and the capacity to fulfil certain educational aspirations (e.g. Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998; Phelan et al., 1991). According to Phelan et al. (1991), if students adapt or transition more smoothly across the boundaries of the school, family and peer worlds, then their success at school is increased. This adaptation is an adaptation of ‘the self’, including identity and worldview, which impacts on success at school and arguably the capacity to fulfil educational aspirations. Drawing on Suarez-Orozco (1987) and Wexler’s (1992) notion of ‘becoming somebody’, Hattam and Smyth (2003) argue that ‘becoming somebody’, is very much influenced by the resources that are attached to class and gender relations. Hattam and Smith (2003) therefore view identity as shaped by the perceptions an individual has of what is possible, based largely on class and gender; this then impacts on goal setting and attainment.

What an individual is able to learn or experience in their world largely determines what they are able to relate to, what they are able to identify with, what they see themselves doing or being, and what they see as valuable or achievable aspirations in life. The literature illustrates the importance of exploring aspirations during adolescence as this is a critical time for identity construction. It further illustrates that this process is complex, with several factors combining to shape identity, and that identity is socially and culturally constructed through experiences. This suggests that research that explores the broader socio-cultural context in which identity is shaped and aspirations are formed may provide further insights into how multiple factors are interwoven to impact on aspirations or the capacity to fulfil these.

Multiple influences on educational and occupational aspirations

The review of the literature so far illustrates how there are many factors that influence aspirations for school and work. Some of these individual, social and cultural factors include self-concept (an individual’s perception of themselves), self-efficacy (an

individual's perception of their ability to perform a task under certain circumstances), abilities, interests, personality, social class, socio-economic status, gender, rurality, ethnicity, identity and worldview. Other factors include various cultural capacities and a range of family background factors such as cultural capital, social capital and economic capital. The influence of cultural traditions, norms, values and expectations also appears in the literature.

Despite the extensive literature on adolescent aspirations, there are conflicting findings regarding the significance of some of the influencing factors and whether or not they interact with other factors, and how (see Bettie, 2002; Epps, 1995; Farrell, Sapp, Johnson & Pollard, 1994; Hubbard, 1999; Lee & Rojewski, 2009; Mau, 2003; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Rojewski, 2005). In addition to this, few studies show how these various factors are interwoven in the broader socio-cultural setting and how this impacts on adolescent aspirations. This may be due to the fact that there are very few studies that ethnographically and biographically explore the aspirations of an adolescent cohort in-depth and in-context. The limited understanding of the interconnections between influencing factors and the limited understanding of the impact of the socio-cultural context may be behind the calls for research that explores the diversity of individual circumstances and the lived experiences of women (e.g. Cartwright, 2004; Harris, 2002; Hubbard, 1999). Harris (2002), for example, argues that this may provide for a more contextual understanding of the factors behind women's decision-making and the complexity of this decision-making process.

It is important to note here that the literature review demonstrates an emerging trend towards exploring social and cultural factors of influence in educational research more broadly. Recent research that explores participation in higher education, youth transitions, success at school, 'choices' and aspirations for higher education is beginning to explore the role of social and cultural factors as opposed to individual factors (e.g. Bettie, 2002; Bok, 2010; Easthorpe & Gabriel, 2008; Gabriel, 2004; Hemmings, 2006; Jones, 2004; Jones et al., 2004; Prosser et al., 2008; Reay, 2006; Reay et al., 2009; Sanders & Munford, 2008; Smith, 2011; Thompson & Holland, 2002; Thompson et al., 2002; Wierenga, 2009; Winterton & Irwin, 2012).

Despite this recent acknowledgement in education circles of the role of culture, the review of the literature still demonstrates a concentration of research on adolescent

aspirations for school and work. The following section discusses the known studies that explore adolescent life aspirations. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, aspirations are defined in this study as those goals that are most desired under ideal circumstances. The following section provides a clear picture of what is known about adolescent life aspirations and illustrates that there are no known studies that explore in-depth and in-context the life aspirations, including underlying affective aspirations, of rural adolescent girls aged 14-16 years (the focus of this study).

Adolescent life aspirations

Affective aspirations

A recent study by Brown (2011) explored the life aspirations of working class adolescents from South East London by analysing interview transcripts from a participatory action research project that also used lifelines. Aspirations are defined by Brown (2011) as “an affective orientation to the future” and framed as a reflection of emotions (p. 20). The participants expressed many ‘surface level’ goals including those for material wealth, success in exams, university, dream jobs, careers of passion (those envisioned to be enjoyable and interesting), travel, a loving family, maintaining relationships and having enough money. They also had underlying aspirations in life, which Brown (2011, p. 16) refers to as ‘holistic aspirations’ including those for emotional wellbeing, stability, happiness, success, fun, enjoyment, adventure, security and comfort.

All of these aspirations were interconnected, with the motivations behind the ‘surface level’ aspirations typically stemming from an underlying emotional desire (Brown, 2011). For example, Brown (2011) connects the girls’ aspirations to be happy within themselves with their aspirations for success, and connects their aspirations to have ‘enough money’ to be comfortable with their emotional desires for security. Brown (2011) found that the boys prioritised their aspiration for wealth and connected this with their perceptions of themselves as providers.

The study by Brown (2011) illustrates a new trend in aspirations research to explore a range of adolescent goals, not just those confined to the contexts of school and work; and also to explore the underlying affective aspirations that shape these. This allows

for an understanding of how multiple aspirations are interconnected with underlying desires such as those for happiness, success, personal fulfilment and security. Research that explores the understandings that adolescents have surrounding what will bring them happiness, success and personal fulfilment, for example, may illustrate how these underlying affective goals impact on the pathways they eventually choose.

Hopes, goals and plans

In the United Kingdom, Baird et al. (2011) explored the “hopes, goals and plans” of Year 13 students across 26 educational institutions through open-ended survey questions. This also included exploring adolescents’ underlying affective aspirations, further demonstrating a new trend in aspirations research. Career aspirations or those surrounding future employment were cited most often, followed by educational aspirations (particularly those for higher education), desires for personal growth (having a happy life in a job they loved), hopes for relationships (or family), and then hopes surrounding having enough money (to live comfortably). Other goals frequently cited in the surveys included those for home ownership, travel and maintaining friendships and relationships.

Baird et al. (2011) aimed to understand any differences between aspirations depending on the ‘type’ of educational setting that the student attended. Baird et al. (2011) found that those students from the vocational schools (FE colleges) more often reported on career aspirations, whereas those from the academic schools (non-FE schools) more often reported on educational aspirations. In terms of aspirations for wealth and relationships, the vocational students cited these more often than the academic students. The students from the academic colleges, however, cited community and personal growth goals more often.

Baird et al. (2011) connect the academic students’ aspirations for success in higher education and the vocational students’ aspirations for jobs with the identity and the socio-economic status attached to the school. This is not analysed or described in detail, however, with Baird et al. (2011) simply arguing that low income students are more likely to attend vocational colleges and hence this is why their aspirations were more focused on manual labour.

Baird et al. (2011) also report that school and work aspirations were prioritised over personal growth and happiness. This finding, however, is not consistent with the findings from Brown (2011) which highlight that aspirations for happiness and well-being are the forces behind other life goals, including those for school and work. This is arguably due to the quantitative nature of the study that did not enable participants to elaborate on their responses and the connections between these.

Looking ‘outward and onward’

Research in Australia by Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2010), involving Grade 10 through to Grade 13 rural students, found that despite a focus on various education and career goals, these students had a range of aspirations. Focus group interviews that explored aspirations and expectations were conducted, and Alloway and Dalley-Trim reported that the ‘vast majority’ of the students wanted ‘to be something’, “they wanted to make something of their lives” (p. 113). The study illustrated that rural students had high aspirations, particularly regarding careers, and most did not want to work in low-paying or mundane jobs.

The students were mainly focused on further education and training as this was what they believed they needed in order ‘to be something’ or to give them more options in life. According to Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2010), the rural students also saw further education and training as “a ticket out of town” (p. 117). They connected this ‘ticket’ with the opportunity to increase their employment options. The study highlighted that the majority had aspirations to move ‘outward and onward’, away from their communities, as this would enable them to fulfil educational and career goals (Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2010). There is limited discussion, however, on the interconnections between many aspirations and how this may influence adolescent decision-making. This may be partially connected with the fact that, according to Alloway and Dalley-Trim:

“Students whose aspirations centred on work and career options represented the dominant voice within the focus groups at every site, at every school visited.” (2010, p. 120)

This demonstrates a need for future research to employ alternative methods for collecting material on life aspirations rather than, or in addition to, focus groups, if it seeks to hear and understand the voices of the less dominant. In saying this, the students may have centred their talk on occupational aspirations because they assumed this is what the interviewer wanted to hear (see Alloway and Dalley-Trim, 2010; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). If this is the case, this suggests that studies that explore adolescent life aspirations need alternative strategies, approaches and methods that enable goals outside of those for school and work to be fully explored.

In connection with Baird et al. (2011) and Brown (2011), the current study also suggests that aspirations research may benefit from exploring underlying affective aspirations such as those ‘to be something’ and to ‘move outward and onward’. This type of in-depth exploration may increase understanding of the complexities surrounding aspiration formation and fulfilment, youth migration and pathway decision-making.

‘Making them do a play without a script’

Another Australian-based research project explored the life aspirations of primary school students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Bok, 2010). The research involved interviews with four students, their teacher, the counsellor at the school and the school principal. It also involved surveys with the parents of the students, which were conducted by the students, for the purpose of collecting contextual information. The elicitation of photographs from the students was another method used in this study to generate discussion during interviews. Bok (2010) concentrated on exploring the influence of the students’ own experiences on their aspirations and their capacity to fulfil them.

Despite the school being categorised as low socio-economic status, the students were ‘optimistic and hopeful’ regarding their ‘preferred futures’ (Bok, 2010). They expressed a range of career possibilities and had ‘back up plans’ to counteract the uncertainties surrounding what they ‘preferred’. The primary school students connected ‘having a good job’ with education and in some cases higher education. Despite having aspirations for higher education, Bok (2010) argues that the students may not have the capacity to fulfil these. This is connected with the finding that they

have limited access to the necessary knowledge and experience required to act on aspirations for higher education or know how to navigate tertiary pathways (Bok, 2010). This knowledge is largely connected to their backgrounds, or more specifically, the range of experiences that may be associated with their low socio-economic status, including access to 'hot knowledge'; this is the kind of information necessary to navigate the road to higher education that is usually gained through family experience or through social networks (see also Ball & Vincent, 1998).

Bok (2010) argues that hot knowledge, and other cultural capacities, impact on a student's navigational skills or their ability to understand 'the script' or 'map'. 'The script' is one that enables for successful navigation of higher education systems and institutions so that aspirations for higher education may be fulfilled. Bok argues that this script is not one that is easily interpreted by those students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

In conjunction with other current research that explores this navigational capacity, but concentrates on aspirations for higher education (Gale, 2010; Smith, 2011; Winterton & Irwin, 2012), Bok's findings suggest further exploring how aspirations are a cultural capacity. Bok's (2010) study also illustrates an emerging trend to explore a range of adolescent aspirations and illustrates how a highly qualitative research approach allows for a culturally contextualised understanding of aspirations.

The local context and opportunity structures

Other aspirations research with an adolescent cohort has been conducted in the Tasmanian context by Wierenga (2009), who explored the choice biographies of 32 isolated young people. Wierenga explored the influence of the local context and opportunity structures on their life chances. The research focused largely on patterned trajectories based on social class or inter-generational factors. Wierenga (2009) reports that the young people in her study based their futures on their experiences of the past or what she refers to as their 'known worlds'.

The study illustrates that local culture in conjunction with issues associated with access to resources, including cultural capital, social capital and economic capital, influences life chances. Wierenga (2009) describes how rural young people have

plans for school and work and other life pursuits; however, the concentration is on how they negotiate their social worlds towards ‘making a life’.

Wierenga (2009) is not able to provide a complete picture of these young people’s individual lives and aspirations outside of themes that are related to resources and opportunities. Wierenga (2009) notes, however, that,

“Fragmenting people’s stories might be a ‘violent’ act but far less so than exposure in a small town.” (p. 46)

Possibly as the study is a longitudinal study that involves in-depth interviews with participants over a long period of time, Wierenga uses the terms life chances, aspirations, plans and future options interchangeably throughout the text. It is therefore not always clear if Wierenga means ‘goals’ (i.e. hopes) or ‘expectations’ (i.e. beliefs) or ‘plans’ (i.e. intended actions). Wierenga’s (2009) core argument is that an individual’s life chances and opportunities are structured through their lived experiences. The study demonstrates a trend towards highly qualitative research that explores adolescent hopes, expectations and plans in the broader socio-cultural context. The study shows that future research on life aspirations that considers the broader contexts of the community, school, family and peer worlds may enable insights into the impacts of structural constraints on rural young people’s life chances.

‘Imagined adulthoods’

Thomson and Holland’s (2002) ‘imagined adulthoods’ study is another example of research that explored the life aspirations of an adolescent cohort. The study explored the expected/predicted life paths of a 15-21 year old cohort in England and Northern Ireland and how these were shaped or constrained through access to resources, gender and class. ‘Lifeline diagrams’ were used and 107 participants were interviewed over a period of two and a half years. The participants were either working class (57%) or middle class (43%) and this was determined through looking at “parental occupation, education, housing status and newspapers read” (Thomson & Holland, 2002, p. 339). Three case studies illustrated how resources, gender and class influenced transitions.

Thomson and Holland (2002) use the terms aspirations and expectations interchangeably, which implies that aspirations are viewed to be the same as

expectations. As Thomson and Holland (2002) discuss the need for research to capture depth in responses rather than ‘ideals’, this suggests the research focus is on what is expected. Thomson and Holland (2002) found differences between the educational expectations of working class and middle class adolescents, with more middle class adolescents reporting that they expected to go to university. Differences between males and females were also reported, with more females expecting to go to university. There were also differences in terms of location, with more students from Northern Ireland than England reporting they expected to go to university. In terms of other life expectations, the majority of the participants, regardless of class, gender and location,

“Expected to be married or in a steady live-in relationship and with children by the age of 35, most expecting marriage.” (Thomson & Holland, 2002, p. 341)

The young people all expressed expectations for greater independence in terms of housing, relationships and work by the time they were 25 years old, although Thomson and Holland (2002) reported some variations depending on social class and location. For example, the middle class group had higher expectations for independence in relation to housing than the working class group.

Thomson and Holland’s study on imagined adulthoods demonstrates the influence of social class, gender and location on expectations for school, work and independence in relation to housing, through three case studies. The case studies provide an example of what the stories of the larger cohort may look like and highlight how the participants have a range of plans for home ownership, education, careers, children, work, relationships, money, economic independence and security. This suggests that young people do have many expectations and plans, some of which are interconnected. It also suggests that even though patterns may exist in young people’s trajectories, individual lives are complex and the approach to exploring them needs to consider this. Thomson and Holland (2002) conclude:

“These young people not only imagine very different futures, but the ways in which they do so are shaped by their experiences and social locations.” (p. 348)

They later add, however, that normative patterns exist, such as the “heteronormative notions of settling down” (Thomson & Holland, 2002, p. 348). What the study highlights in particular is that despite patterns or themes in the data collected, case studies allow for a contextual understanding of how expectations are shaped and the diversity of individual lives. This suggests a need for aspirations/expectations research that explores adolescent experiences and goals in greater context and in greater depth. Thomson and Holland’s study is also an example of how biographical methods are emerging in educational research that explores youth pathways and expectations/aspirations.

Work/study priorities, aspirations and social capital

Research in Tasmania by Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman (2001) that explored the potential pathways of rural Grade 10 students through questionnaires and interviews also reported on goals outside of those for school and work. The questionnaires explored the importance of work and study aspirations alongside those for other life aspirations, including those related to relationships and family. The findings from this questionnaire illustrate that young people rate education and training very highly, but they also consider it a priority to remain near their family and friends (Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2001, p. 52).

The questionnaire was effective in highlighting that the young people in the study considered numerous possibilities for themselves. It also enabled insights into how they prioritised work and education and how these were closely followed by having a social life and pursuing interests as well as staying near family and friends (Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2001). The study illustrates that the participants believed it was important to have a job, go to school, earn money, travel and see the world and to do a variety of other things in life. It highlighted that their study and work choices were significantly influenced by social capital. The findings suggest that the social capital in these rural communities may lead the students into local jobs rather than on to further education as accessing further education takes them away from their families and local networks. The study highlights a contradiction that exists in the literature in regards to rural aspirations ‘to stay’ versus rural aspirations ‘to leave’. Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman’s (2002) findings illustrate that rural young people prioritise desires to remain close to home, for example, whereas other studies report stronger desires to

‘move outward and onward’ or leave home to pursue higher education (e.g. Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2010; Easthorpe & Gabriel, 2008). These conflicting findings suggest that there is an additional level of complexity surrounding educational decision-making for rural young people, depending on the degree of rurality, as they often have to choose one way or the other.

Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman (2001) provide insights into how social capital in rural communities encourages local labour force participation and impacts on educational decision-making. It also demonstrates the emerging trend to explore aspirations outside of the school and work contexts. The study illustrates how research that explores ‘cultural capacities’, such as social capital in connection with life aspirations more broadly (e.g. ‘staying close to family and friends’), may provide insights into how the broader socio-cultural context impacts on participation in education and the workforce.

Adolescent life aspirations in-context

The research on adolescent life aspirations shows a trend towards exploring a broader range of adolescent aspirations than has typically been done previously. It demonstrates that adolescents have multiple aspirations, some of which include underlying emotional or affective aspirations. Two of the studies also explore the connections between ‘surface level’ aspirations such as those for education, careers, travel, parenthood and lifestyle and those that appear as beliefs, perspectives or emotions such as desires ‘to be something’, ‘to move outward and onward’ or to have happiness and health/wellbeing (e.g. Brown, 2011; Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2010). Bok (2010) and Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman (2001) illustrate the impacts of experiences in the socio-cultural context on aspirations, suggesting these warrant further exploration. Biographical approaches in life aspirations research are also beginning to emerge suggesting a new trend towards exploring the impacts of the socio-cultural context, including, for example, structural and class constraints (e.g. Thompson & Holland, 2002; Wierenga, 2009).

The studies mentioned above highlight a new direction for aspirations research which considers that adolescents have multiple aspirations. Some of these studies also demonstrate a move towards exploring how the broader socio-cultural context shapes

these aspirations. The literature review overall illustrates a notable lack of research that explores the life aspirations of rural adolescent girls in-depth and in-context. In fact, there are no studies known to the author that biographically explore rural adolescent girls' multiple goals and how these are shaped in the cultural context.

Research also illustrates that even when aspirations are explored outside of the contexts of higher education and the workforce, participants still tend to focus on their aspirations for work and careers above other life aspirations (see Baird et al., 2011; Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2010). This demonstrates that studies that explore life aspirations need to consider research approaches that enable for depth in participant responses. These include approaches that ensure the participants have a voice in the research process, lead conversations and describe their thoughts, perspectives and aspirations in detail. This includes approaches that encourage the participants to think more about their responses, rather than only expressing what they believe the researcher want to hear. To enable for this, trusting, respectful relationships with participants must be developed over time and in-depth conversations must be had. This is difficult to achieve through quantitative research approaches that typically provide participants with options in boxes to consider 'ranking'. It is therefore necessary to consider highly qualitative ethnographic approaches to exploring adolescent life aspiration as these allow for relationships to be established, detailed responses to be captured and the words of the participants to be included. This approach, and what it enables, is discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

3. Capturing complexities with narrative and ethnography

“Ethnography involves an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context...it combines research design, fieldwork, and various methods of inquiry to produce historically, politically and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives.” (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455)

The purpose, the paradigm and the approach

The construction of knowledge and cultural description

This study qualitatively explores the life aspirations of 11 rural adolescent girls, and seeks to address the question, “How are the aspirations of adolescent girls in the Cradle Coast region shaped by their cultural worlds?”. In order to respond to the research question, this study is located in the constructivist paradigm and employs a qualitative ethnographic approach. Constructivist approaches view the world as being “complex and interconnected” (Shkedi, 2005, p. 3) and knowledge as being constructed and co-created rather than simply found or discovered (Schwandt, 2000). According to Shkedi (2005), the constructivist or interpretivist mode of thought may also be referred to as the “narrative way of knowing” (p. 9). As detailed meaningful descriptions and context are important aspects of qualitative ethnographic approaches, these approaches are suited to and situated within the narrative/constructivist paradigm.

Qualitative approaches enable for detailed background material, the ‘insider’s point of view’ and ‘voice’, hence adding depth, meaning and context (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Shkedi, 2005). These approaches concentrate on the “socially constructed nature of reality” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 13) and the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to their experiences (Travers, 2010). According to Madden (2010),

ethnographic approaches are closely associated with qualitative research and are concerned with understanding groups of people, societies or cultures.

Ethnography allows for an understanding of the ‘emic perspective’ and enables ‘thick description’ surrounding actions and the meanings behind them in the cultural context. According to Madden (2010), “An emic perspective is one that reflects the insider’s or research participant’s point of view” (p. 19). An ‘insider’ is a person from within a particular cultural group, otherwise referred to as an informant or key informant, particularly in anthropology (e.g. Bernard, 2006; Madden, 2010; Marcus, 1998; Murchison, 2010). More specifically, Mishler (1986) refers to informants in anthropology as being “members of a culture” (p. 123).

According to Geertz (1993), ‘thick description’ is not simply a description of actions or behaviours. ‘Thick description’ includes interpretation about experiences and behaviours that details “their import” and what “is getting said” (Geertz, 1993, p. 10). In addition to ‘thick description’ being interpretive it is also ‘microscopic’ (Geertz, 1993). This level of description allows for insights to be gained into the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions in addition to the ‘what’ questions. In this study, this level of description is obtained through the collection of personal stories and artefacts during in-depth life history interviews and informal interviews. According to Heyl (2001), the life history interview, or ethnographic interview, is “up close and personal” (p. 370) and allows for strong relationships, trust and rapport to be built over time. Personal stories and artefacts are collected during these interviews. As interviews are often relied upon as a method for collecting stories in ethnographic research (Cortazzi, 2001), this is an appropriate platform for data collection in this study. The personal stories enable an understanding of how individuals experience, perceive and know the world (see Shkedi, 2005). If “stories are the end product of a narrative way of knowing” (Shkedi, 2005, p. 9), or a constructivist way of knowing, the method of collecting narratives in this study is well suited to the paradigm in which it is located.

Traditionally in ethnography (undertaken by anthropologists) ‘the field’ includes research in remote locations focusing on ‘exotic cultures’; however, in more recent years it has also come to include the researcher’s own home-town or local neighbourhood (see Madden, 1999; Murchison, 2010). ‘The field’ in this study is the author’s home-town and therefore geographically, socially, emotionally and culturally

‘familiar’, as opposed to exotic (see Madden, 1999). Ethnographic methodologies also traditionally include participant observation as a component of the fieldwork for the research. In this study, however, personal stories and artefacts are collected during pre-arranged in-depth interviews with informants, rather than when engaged in participant observation. Recent debate suggests that the nature of fieldwork in anthropological research is changing (see Faubion & Marcus, 2009; Hockey & Forsey, 2012), and that it is necessary to consider how research may be defined as ethnographic based on the overall approach and what this achieves; rather than the method of data collection alone (Hockey & Forsey, 2012). In this study, interviews enabled ethnographic insights to be drawn from conversations about aspirations rather than through observations (see Forsey, 2010). The interviews were arguably a tool for discovering “what we do not and cannot find out otherwise” (Hockey & Forsey, 2012, p. 70) and allowed for an understanding of the underlying beliefs and values that drive behaviour (Hockey & Forsey, 2012; see also Holy & Stuchlik, 1983).

Although the “location for doing research” (Murchison, 2010, p. 14) in this study was not a typical ethnographic field site and participant observation was not a method for collecting data, the approach allows for an understanding of the insider’s perspectives and worldviews, which is the main purpose of ethnography (see Madden, 2010). This study is therefore guided by the notion from Hockey and Forsey (2012) that ‘ethnography is not participant observation’ (p. 69) and that it is necessary to consider how research may be seen as ethnographic based on the overall approach, not just the method of data collection.

The research participants

A triangulation of ‘insider perspectives’ from within the region

Following ethics approval, adolescent girls living in areas in the Cradle Coast region of Tasmania, their mothers and their school principals were invited to participate in this study. It was not the author’s intention to dismiss the importance of the role of fathers, sisters or others, but rather to obtain a triangulation of insider perspectives from three of the main key players in the girls’ cultural worlds (see Basit, 2003). An invitation to participate in the research was mailed to all secondary school principals in each municipality in the Cradle Coast region, along with an information sheet about

the study, consent form and advertisement. Telephone conversations and/or face-to-face meetings with school principals about the research, including their interest in supporting it, followed approximately two weeks after the initial invitation.

School principals who wished to support the study were asked to place the advertisement in the school newsletter and provide any students who responded to it with an information sheet and consent form. Eleven girls from seven different schools across the region showed an interest in being involved in the research and were provided with information sheets and consent forms. All of the girls who responded to the invitation then became participants in this study. As nine of the girls' mothers, six school principals and one school business manager responded to the invitation, they also became participants.

Mothers' views are important to the study, as research demonstrates that mothers have a significant influence on their daughters' aspirations (Brooks, 2004; Furlong, 1986; Kerpleman et al., 2002; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002), as do aspects of the mother/daughter relationship (O'Brien & Fassinger, 1993; Rainey & Borders, 1997). Additionally, research by Nurmi (2004, as cited in Beal & Crockett, 2010) found that adolescents base their futures around norms and parental expectations, and Bryce and Anderson (2008) state that families play a significant role in the career decision-making of young people. The girls' mothers would therefore be able to offer insights into the family world, including their own perceived influence on their daughters' aspirations.

The perspectives of the school principals are important to the study, as principals can provide valuable information on how the programs they offer in schools, the subjects taught, and the support personnel employed have an influence on aspirations. Research demonstrates that these kinds of student experiences all impact on a student's awareness of their options (see Baynes, 2004; Mau, 2003; Noack et al., 2010). Principals were informants who were able to provide insights into the influence of these factors. In addition to this, principals in relatively small towns were able to provide a broad overview of the area in terms of the mechanisms in place to support young people and comment on the broader community world outside of the immediate educational context. The school business manager in this study was able to contribute insights that were consistent with those expressed by the principals

regarding student experiences within the school and the types of influences on aspirations. The school business manager was also able to describe the wider community in detail and provide an insider perspective as was the case with the principals.

Determining the geographical spread of the girls

The adolescent participants in this study were located across six out of the nine municipalities in the Cradle Coast region, which includes the Circular Head, King Island, West Coast, Waratah-Wynyard, Burnie, Central Coast, Devonport, Latrobe and Kentish municipalities in total. In broad terms, the Cradle Coast region itself is considered rural, as no communities are located within a metropolitan city (see Hugo, 2000, as cited in Robinson, 2012); however, the degree of rurality differed amongst the girls in this study. For example, six of the 11 girls resided in areas at least 90 kilometres from one of the regional centres and/or attended a district high school, and the other five girls resided within 20 kilometres of a regional centre.

The district high schools in this study provide for students from kindergarten through to Year 10 and are commonly referred to as country schools or rural schools. Some of these schools also offer various, but limited, Year 11 and 12 subjects and/or vocational education and training. These district high schools accommodate for the needs of a broad age range and have small student populations in comparison to the other high schools in the region. For example, one Year 10 cohort at a district high school in this study had less than 20 students. The district high schools in this study arguably have more limited access to the range of educational resources and experiences in comparison to those that are available in the larger schools located nearer to the regional centres.

Six of the girls in this study will be required to either relocate to engage in compulsory college education or spend three hours per day by bus or car to engage in compulsory education. The other five girls may also encounter access barriers associated with transport, despite their relatively close proximity to regional colleges. Of all of the 11 girls in this study, however, only four would be considered to be living in an isolated community if the measurement of isolation is based on geographical location alone. The degree of 'rurality' is therefore varied in this sample.

The degree of ‘rurality’ is an important factor to explore in more depth, as it influences aspirations and the capacity to fulfil these, as well as participation in education (e.g. Abbott-Chapman, 2002; James et al., 1999; Rojewski, 1995; Warner-Smith & Lee, 2001).

Determining the socioeconomic spread of the girls

Another important factor to explore in-depth, as it also influences aspirations, the ‘capacity to aspire’ and participation in higher education is socio-economic status or social class (see Ball, Reay & David, 2002; Bok, 2010; Bowden & Doughney, 2010; Furlong, 1986; Furlong & Biggart, 1999; Gale, 2010; Jones et al., 2004; Prosser et al., 2008; Reay, 2004, 2009; Reay & Lucey, 2003; Smith, 2011; St Clair & Benjamin, 2011; Thompson et al., 2002; Winterton & Irwin, 2012).

Based on the typical measurement of social class (which is the father’s educational level or occupational prestige level), the girls in this study are predominantly what may be termed as ‘the traditional working class’. This is because the majority of the girls in this study have fathers who have completed only their high school education (Year 10). Most of the fathers entered the workforce on completing Year 10, with only two completing apprenticeships and obtaining trade qualifications (one as a welder and one as a mechanic) and one completing a diploma of agriculture. None of the fathers has completed a university qualification. In terms of occupational status, the girls’ fathers are mostly blue-collar workers in the areas of manufacturing, farming and the trades. Two of the fathers, however, are white-collar workers in management positions (one in forestry and one in mining).

The above information regarding the father’s educational level and status suggests that the girls in this study are mostly from working class backgrounds. The ‘traditional working class’, particularly in the European and American contexts, are typically seen as low income earners. When viewed in this way, a picture is painted that would suggest that all of the girls in this study are from low socio-economic backgrounds. Employing the postcode method of determining socio-economic status or taking into account the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) would also suggest that the girls in this study are predominantly from low socio-economic backgrounds or communities considered more disadvantaged.

Recent research, however, demonstrates that socio-economic status and social class are not easily determined, particularly through examining income levels or postcodes alone (see Bradley et al., 2008; Bowden & Doughney, 2010; Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011; Savage, Devine, Cunningham, Taylor, Li, et al., 2013; Thomson & Holland, 2002). This study therefore employed a more comprehensive approach to determining socio-economic background through acknowledgement of the educational attainment levels of both parents, estimated household incomes and estimated value of assets such as property (based on information collected from the girls). Using this method for determining socio-economic background, the girls in this study are not all from 'traditional' working class backgrounds, as other methods of measurement would suggest. When a more comprehensive approach to measuring socio-economic status was employed, it was determined that four of the girls in this study were from low socio-economic backgrounds, four were from middle income families and three were from middle-high income families.

The girls in this study were therefore from locations with varying degrees of rurality, and there is an even socio-economic spread. The girls have, however, encountered a range of experiences within their community, school, family and peer worlds, and they have various abilities, personalities, levels of confidence and interests. Much of this may be seen in the following chapter, which contains the girls' life history portraits.

The elicitation of stories and artefacts

Ethnographic interviews, personal stories and artefacts

In this study, personal stories were collected from the adolescent participants by the author during three individual in-depth life history interviews over a period of six months. Ethnographic interviewing allows the researcher to collect "rich, detailed data directly from the participants" and is a method that is increasingly being employed across disciplines and fields (Heyl, 2001, p. 369). According to Heyl (2001), the life history interview, or ethnographic interview, is different to other types of interviews in three main ways. Firstly, it allows for trust and rapport to be developed over time; secondly, it allows for the informants to feel empowered and potentially shape the

interview questions or the focus of the study; and thirdly, it allows for an understanding of the worldviews of the informants (Heyl, 2001).

The ethnographic interviews in this study empowered the informants and enabled a deeper understanding of how experiences are interpreted and how cultural meanings are attached to these experiences (Heyl, 2001). The interviews generated 'rich, detailed data' from the informants which was mainly in the form of personal stories. The term 'personal stories' is used because the narratives collected describe "aspects of individual experience" and include "extended speech acts about substantial or compelling aspects of life" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 1). The girls' personal stories allowed for meaningful in-context descriptions about their lived experiences and future plans in the context of their community, school, family and peer worlds. In most cases, the interviews took place in unoccupied offices at the high schools the girls attended, as this was their preference. However, the initial interviews with Lauren and Taylor [pseudonyms] were in their own homes, as this was requested by them – possibly because these interviews fell during one of the school holiday breaks.

As a means of further understanding the girls' lives and aspirations through an ethnographic approach and from a constructivist perspective, the interviews with the adolescent girls involved artefact elicitation (see Barrett & Smigiel, 2003). For Barrett and Smigiel (2003), artefact elicitation involved collecting art work and photographs from young participants to gain an understanding of the value, purpose and meaning that children attach to the arts. This method enables the perspectives of the participants to be explored and provides "opportunities for the co-construction of meaning" (Barrett & Smigiel, 2003, p. 4). Artefact elicitation therefore allows participants to be valued and heard, or given a voice in the research.

Although not defined as artefact elicitation, this method has been employed in aspirations research to generate data and provide a platform for the co-creation of meaning, which allows for insider perspectives and voices to be understood (e.g. Bok, 2010; O'Rielly, 2005; Sanders & Munford, 2008; Siren, Diemer, Jackson, Gonsalves & Howell, 2004; Thompson & Holland, 2003). Siren et al. (2004), in their American study, collected goal maps and identity collages to gain a deeper understanding of the aspirations of urban adolescents. Similarly, in recent youth transitions studies in Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, artefacts such as memory books

(scrapbooks/diaries), lifelines (drawings of predictions and expectations of the future), creative writing (e.g. songs and stories), art work, social network maps and ‘photographs of significant locations’ were also collected as a means of drawing out more depth in responses (e.g. Bok, 2010; Sanders & Munford, 2008; Thompson & Holland, 2003). Artefacts, along with various other forms of data, are also collected in anthropological research more broadly, as this allows the researcher to “better understand the group of people we are coming to know” (O’Reilly, 2005, p. 157). In this study, the artefacts that were collected included career plans, various photographic collages, aspirations mind maps and lists, award certificates, school newsletters, photographs, song lyrics, written school work, paintings, artwork and poetry (see Appendices 6 – 16 for a selection of de-identified examples). These artefacts generated conversations that were detailed and led by the girls, which allowed for depth and meaning-making in the participant responses.

According to Holstein and Gubrium (2003), “researchers have become more aware of the interview as a site for the production of meaning” (p. 32). The artefact elicitation in this study generated conversation and aided in this ‘production’ as it enabled more depth, explanation and questioning in the interviews. The girls were able to expand on their own thoughts and feelings with the author during the interviews, creating a situation where the meanings behind the artefacts, and the stories these produced, could be unpacked and interpreted together. This is important in this study, as the co-construction of knowledge and interpretation and understanding of cultural meanings, are key concerns in constructivist and ethnographic approaches (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Geertz, 1993; Madden, 2010; Schwandt, 2000; Travers, 2010).

In this study, the empowerment and relationship building that distinguishes ethnographic interviews from other types of interviews (Heyl, 2001), began during the first interview. This was an introduction to the research and a guided conversation about school subjects, interests, work, family and day to day life. During this time, the girls completed a four page ‘questions sheet’ (see Appendix 1) and talked ‘out loud’ as they completed this. During this ethnographic interview, the girls led the discussion with the ‘questions sheet’ and the author actively listened and occasionally prompted, allowing the power to balance in favour of the informants from the very beginning. Although the initial guided conversations generated personal stories about school life,

home life, relationships, friendships and work life, the focus was on forming respectful relationships and building trust through empowerment, a key objective in ethnographic interviewing (Heyl, 2001).

During these initial conversations the girls were invited to bring artefacts to the second interview that would ‘tell a story’ about how they saw themselves or their futures. The girls were given a scrapbook containing blank examples and templates of the types of artefacts they could create themselves. One page, for example, was titled ‘What are my aspirations?’ Below this title were prompts, including, ‘What are my future goals? What do I want to be when I grow up? What do I want to do in the future?’ Other blank templates had titles encouraging photographic collages, lists or mind maps. Figure 3 is included below as an example of a ‘completed’ blank template from Beth’s artefact book.

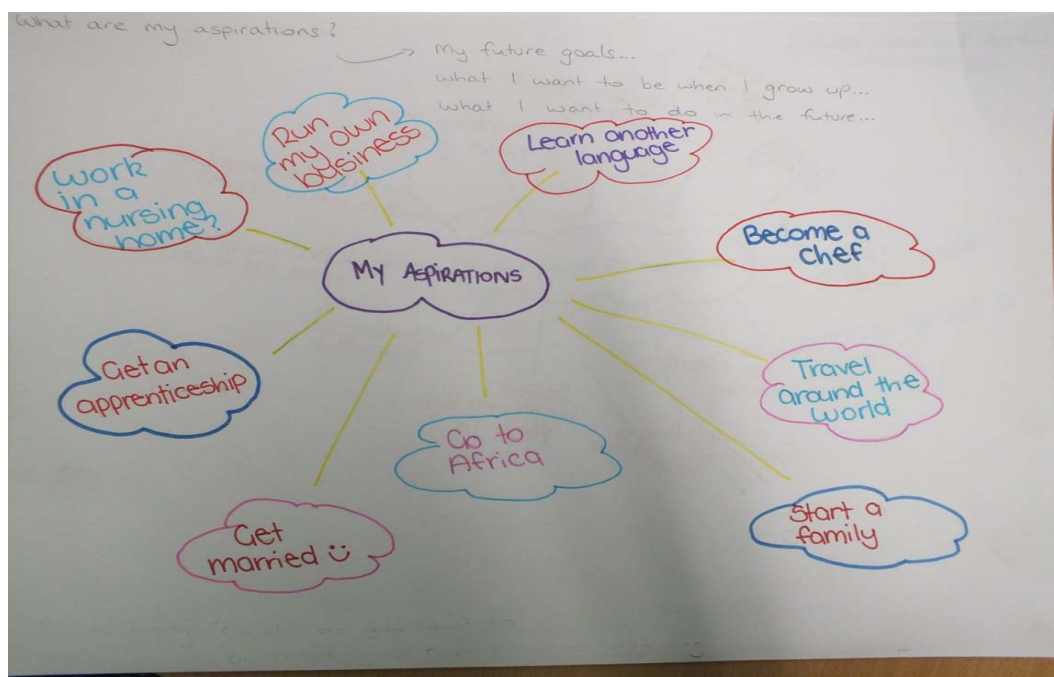


Figure 3. Mind map from ‘artefact template book’ [Beth]

All of the girls brought in at least one artefact with them when they came to the second interview, but most of the girls brought in several artefacts (see Appendices 6-16 for a selection of examples). The girls typically led the conversations with their artefact books as tools to guide them, and the author prompted and asked questions from the interview schedule throughout (see Appendix 2 for the interview schedule).

This moved the authority over to the girls, providing them with more control over how they shared their stories and explored the meanings behind them with the author. Establishing the relationship and empowering the informants, as is consistent with ethnographic interviewing, continued on from the first interview into the second as the girls led the discussions with their artefacts. This alleviated some of the concerns around the power imbalance in interviews with young people (see Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Heyl, 2001). It allowed the girls to play a lead role in the co-creation of knowledge, which is important in constructivist studies (Schwandt, 2000). The approach further provided an understanding of the girls' experiences and perspectives, including their worldviews, which is the core purpose of ethnography (Madden, 2010).

The second interviews with the girls were informal but in-depth, and time and care was taken when collecting their stories and exploring their artefacts. The depth of questioning in the second interviews, in conjunction with artefact elicitation, produced descriptive accounts of experiences and actions. This enabled an accurate interpretation of the meanings behind thoughts and behaviours, a key focus in ethnographic research (Geertz, 1993). The third interview started with the girls reviewing the transcripts from the first two interviews and looking at their artefacts. A consequence of beginning the interview in this manner was that the conversations were again led by the girls. This shifted the power to them, and the interview was informal and relaxed, as is consistent with ethnographic interviewing (Heyl, 2001). As relationships had been well established by the third interview, the author was able to ask additional questions to those in the schedule (see Appendix 3) that were designed to gain a further understanding of the girls' worldviews and philosophical viewpoints, which was important to this ethnographic study (Madden, 2010).

The in-depth ethnographic interviews with each of the girls in this study were recorded to ensure accuracy and subsequently transcribed by the author. These transcriptions were completed following each interview and prior to engaging in the next scheduled interview. The guided conversation, for example, was transcribed before the second interview took place and the second interview was transcribed before the third interview took place. In between interviews, the author carefully reviewed the transcripts and listened to the recordings a second and third time. This

enabled a more personalised approach to subsequent interviews and assisted the author to determine areas for further questioning that were not already in the interview schedule.

Participant confirmation was obtained from the girls by providing them with the opportunity to review all transcripts. This occurred at the beginning of the third interview (the first two interview transcripts) and then once again following the third interview. The girls at this time did not request to omit or clarify any responses, but participant confirmation gave them “more voice in the research process”, an important consideration in research with young people (Eder & Fingerson, 2002, p. 198). Consent from the girls to use their stories and artefacts for research purposes was confirmed during this time.

Informal interviews and personal stories

Personal stories were obtained by the author during informal, in-depth interviews with the girls’ mothers and their school principals. The interviews allowed for adult ‘insider perspectives’ and provided insights into the factors that impact on adolescent aspirations from other key informants within the girls’ cultural worlds. This allowed for a triangulation of perspectives (Basit, 2003).

There was one individual interview with each of the mothers and one individual interview with each of the school principals. Five of the mothers were interviewed in an unoccupied office at the school that their daughter attended. The remaining four mothers were interviewed in their own homes. The interviews with the school principals took place in the principal’s office and the interview with the school business manager was in a meeting room. The interviews were conducted in these locations based on the preferences of the participants.

The adult in-depth interviews involved open-ended questions that focused on the community, school, family and peer worlds. This focus was to obtain material around how cultural worlds shape aspirations and to gain insights useful for addressing the research question. The girls’ mothers were asked about their hopes for their daughters’ future and what they could see their daughters eventually doing with their lives. Other questions concentrated on their perception of any factors (or people) that

may have influenced their daughters' aspirations or decision-making around their future (see Appendix 4 for the interview schedule).

The principals were asked to describe the wider school community and their thoughts in terms of community aspirations. The questions were largely about the school environment itself, programs, educational offerings and how they perceived the influence of the school and teachers on aspirations. Other questions included those surrounding parental expectations, values and barriers, and supports to assist young people to achieve their aspirations (see Appendix 5 for the interview schedule).

The interviews with the adults were recorded for accuracy and subsequently transcribed. Participant confirmation was obtained from the mothers and the school principals following the forwarding of transcriptions soon after the interview had taken place. This was done to provide the opportunity to clarify responses and to ensure accuracy.

Two approaches to analysis

A thematic analysis

In this study, there were two approaches to the data analysis. The first approach was a thematic analysis which is commonly used in qualitative research when interviews have been conducted (Walters, 2006). According to Walters (2006), "In essence, a theme is a central idea that emerges from the data" (p. 271). Thematic analysis involves either exploring the data for pre-determined themes or coding the data to determine what these themes may be (Walters, 2006). The analysis in this study involved 'coding' the personal stories and artefacts collected from the girls and 'coding' the personal stories collected from the adult informants (Saldana, 2009). According to Saldana (2009):

"A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data." (p. 3)

There are various types of coding types in qualitative research and these are largely dependent on the methodological approach (Walters, 2006). In this study, manual in-

vivo coding, values coding and narrative coding were the coding methods used to determine shared categories and shared themes (see Saldana, 2009). In-vivo coding captures the voices of the informants in a study through coding their own language, including certain phrases or a word (Saldana, 2009). This enables an understanding of the informant's perspectives and worldviews, and the meanings they attribute to certain thoughts and actions (Saldana, 2009). Another type of coding, values coding, also enables an understanding of insider perspectives and worldviews, but it further allows for cultural values to be explored. According to Saldana (2009):

“Values Coding is the application of codes onto qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview.” (p. 89)

Values coding is useful in determining core aspects of the participants' belief systems through pinpointing responses that contain phrases such as ‘I believe’, ‘I think’, ‘I feel’, ‘I want’, ‘I like’, ‘I love’, ‘It's important that’ and any phrases that highlight something that is considered valuable to an informant (Saldana, 2009). Narrative coding is complementary to the above coding methods, as it allows for an understanding of the message or meaning behind words. It involves coding blocks of texts for repeated words and phrases, recurring elements (motifs) and flashbacks (Saldana, 2009).

These three types of coding were applied to the personal stories and artefacts collected in this study so as to capture an understanding of insider perspectives, cultural values and cultural meanings (Saldana, 2009). These coding methods are suited to this qualitative ethnographic study, as they allow for an understanding of a particular cultural group, their worldviews and the meanings behind thoughts and actions (Geertz, 1993; Gobo, 2008; Madden, 2010; O'Rielly, 2005). The thematic analysis in this study involved the coding of 49 interview transcripts. Thirty-three were from the three interviews with each of the 11 girls, seven were from the interviews with the school principals and nine were from the interviews with the mothers. Guided largely by Saldana (2009), language, word choice, certain phrases and values statements as well as repetitions, motifs and flashbacks were highlighted over the duration of the coding.

The stories collected during interviews were the key source of data in this study. The artefacts that contained sentences or statements were also assigned in-vivo and values codes, as these were secondary data sources (see Walters, 2006; Saldana, 2009). The artefacts that were not coded included visual artefacts such as identity collages or artefacts such as song lyrics and poetry, as these generated conversation and produced personal stories for analysis. In these incidences the codes were therefore assigned to the stories that the artefacts generated during the interviews. The coding was completed manually using trees and nodes in Microsoft Word. Colour-coded material was transferred from each of the 49 interviews into one central document, where participant pseudonyms remained attached to the words and phrases (codes). This allowed for a clear understanding of how many times a particular code appeared within, as well as across, the data collected and for the context of the girls' stories to be maintained throughout the coding process. To ensure rigor in the coding process, notes were made when differences or exceptions to the norm appeared and the author kept a journal to reflect on coding choices and emerging patterns (see Saldana, 2009).

The thematic analysis allowed for shared core themes to be identified across the girls' personal stories and artefacts, and for key messages to be identified across the stories collected from the adult informants (see Saldana, 2009). In-vivo, values and narrative coding informed the sub-categories, categories, themes and meta-themes in this study. The themes are connected to the girls' shared aspirations (those aspirations held by the majority of girls in this study) and these were generated through the coding of the girls' transcripts, particularly the coding of the language and word choice they used when talking about their aspirations. The themes and shared aspirations are discussed in more detail throughout Chapter Five.

The construction of life history portraits

In this study, the second approach to the data analysis included the construction of life histories for the 11 girls in this study. A selection of eight of these are included in Chapter Four, due to "time, space and purpose" (Wolcott, 1983, p. 8). The eight portraits have been selected so as to include a cross-section of voices and degrees of rurality within the limits of space: the selection includes three girls who were living in geographically isolated towns, three in larger, more central towns and two who were

living in farming communities. The other three stories, while interesting, did not contribute additional insights relevant to understanding the research question.

As the second approach to the analysis included the construction of life histories, it “produces stories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 6) that focus on the girls’ aspirations and their lives, in ‘part’, at a particular point in time. According to Watson and Watson-Franke (1985):

“A life history is any retrospective account by the individual of his life in whole or part, in written or oral form, that has been elicited or prompted by another person.” (p. 2)

Life histories provide for the “insider’s views of culture and daily life” (Chase, 2005, p. 654) and “they bridge cultural history with personal biography” (Plummer, 2001, p. 396). This genre of writing is well suited to the ethnographic approach taken in this study, as life histories allow for ‘thick description’, an understanding of the ‘emic perspective’ and an understanding of worldviews, which are all key concerns in ethnography (see Geertz, 1993; Gobo, 2008; Madden, 2010). Further to this, according to Tedlock (2000):

“One of the earliest and most popular narrative genres to be developed by ethnographers is the biography, or life history.” (p. 459)

Although the life history is recognised as a narrative genre (see Atkinson, 2007; Tedlock, 2000), in this thesis, the biographies are referred to as ‘portraits’ rather than narratives. This is because the life histories in this thesis may not be viewed across disciplines as narratives, because they are not “thematically organized by plots” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). The portraits do not include detailed characterisation and storylines, and the events and actions within them are not always clearly drawn together in an organised manner to form a ‘traditional’ narrative per se (see Polkinghorne, 1995). The reason for this is based, in part, by the need to concentrate on “what it is” that the research aimed to “understand and explain” and “how it got that way”, as this is the main focus of “narrative styles of analysis” (Becker, 1998, p. 57). The structure and style of the girls’ life histories is also impacted on by other considerations related to the research purpose, which are outlined shortly.

There are many forms of life writing and the term life histories is often used interchangeably with life stories or other terms such as life documents, biographies, self stories, personal narratives and personal documents (see Atkinson, 2007; Plummer, 2001; Tierney, 1998). Although life histories and life stories are arguably similar writing styles (see Atkinson, 2007), the two are different, as may be seen in the following from Hatch and Wisniewski (1995), who clarify:

“An analysis of the social, historical, political and economic contexts of a life story by the researcher is what turns a life story into a life history.” (p. 125)

This perspective from Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) positions life stories as ‘collected’ and life histories as the final writing product that is ‘constructed’ from these. Atkinson (2007) argues, however, that “there is very little difference between a life story and a life history” (p. 125) and points out that the final product varies according to the disciplinary perspective and approach of the researcher:

“Because of the broad interdisciplinary use of the life story, as well as the particular approach of each interviewer, or researcher, the final forms of life stories can vary greatly. On the one hand, a life story can read as mostly the researcher’s own description of what was said, done or intimated. On the other, it can be 100 percent first-person narrative in the words of the person interviewed.” (p. 123)

The life histories in this study include the girls’ stories about their aspirations in the first-person, with other social, cultural and economic context, including the role of the author, woven through. This enables a clear picture of their aspirations and how these are shaped by their community, school, family and peer worlds – which is the focus of this research. It further allows for an understanding of how the researcher comes to know what it is that she knows. The life histories in this thesis are fashioned in a particular way for a particular reason, but depending on the reader’s disciplinary background, the form may not be expected or preferred and the purpose may not be clear. An explanation and justification for this is presented below.

Aspects of the style, structure and focus of the girls' stories in the following chapter are based on the work of other qualitative researchers who have written life histories, life stories or portraits (i.e. Barone, 1989; Tierney, 2009; Wolcott, 1983). The life story of Billy Charles Barnett by Thomas Barone (1989), Harry Wolcott's (1983) 'life history of a sneaky kid' and William Tierney's (2009) 'portraits' of three adolescents 'applying for college' all include the researcher's actions and interpretations in the story, which allows for an understanding of how the researcher came to know what it is they know. The research story itself is therefore included, in some way and to varying degrees by these authors, along with cultural descriptions and insights gained from the research.

Guided by the inclusion of the researcher in the above-mentioned texts, the life history portraits in Chapter Four include a description of the research process as well as the researcher's interpretations. Including the research story in the portraits in the following chapter allows for contextualisation of the author's role and an understanding of how knowledge was constructed and co-created (e.g. Heyl, 2001; Mischler, 1986; Tierney, 2009; Tierney, 1997; Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985). Tierney (2009), but more so Wolcott (1983), also includes the words of the informants in the text. Guided in part by these two authors, and the fact that it is not unusual for life stories or life histories to be in the first person, the girls' portraits in Chapter Four typically contain personal narratives and direct quotes from the informants (see Atkinson, 2007; Spradley, 1979; Wolcott, 1983).

Further to this, Atkinson (2007) argues that to understand the experiences and perspectives of the individual, it is important to "let their voices be heard" and, "there is no better way to get this than in that person's own voice" (p. 124). The inclusion of the direct language of the informants additionally allows for an understanding of the perceptions and worldviews of the insider; this is important to this study as it is the main purpose of ethnography (see Madden, 2010; Spradley, 1979, as cited in Heyl, 2001; Wolcott, 1982, as cited in Heyl, 2001).

Another justification for including the voices of the participants in the portraits in Chapter Four, in conjunction with the need to understand their perspectives, rests in the author's desire to accurately represent the girls and provide the girls with a 'voice' in the research process.

According to, Eder and Fingerson (2002), for example:

“It is important to represent youth in their own terms in data analysis and presentation. Not only does this help maintain their power in the research interaction, but it preserves their conceptions and meanings in the analysis and text...this can be done through liberal use of direct quotes from the interviews...we should sustain the participants’ language use, as it adds new perspectives and greater depth to the data and analyses.” (p. 197)

The life history portraits of the girls in this study are less reflective of Barone’s (1989) writing style. This is because despite providing for an understanding of how the researcher comes to know what he knows, this is less prominent in Barone’s (1989) writing in comparison to that of Tierney (2009) and Wolcott (1983). In addition to this, Barone (1989) rarely includes the participant’s own words in the text. As the life histories describe the research process in-depth and contain large excerpts of the girls’ own words, they are most often reflective of a combination of Tierney’s (2009) and Wolcott’s (1983) writing styles.

Tierney (2009) focuses on the research process, the researcher’s interpretations and the co-creation of knowledge and includes some direct quotes from the informants; whereas Wolcott (1983) focuses on including personal narratives which are preceded and followed by contextual details, including the role and interpretations of the author. A combination of the two writing styles in the life histories allows for a ‘balance’ between detailing the research and including the actual voices of the informants and describing their cultural worlds. According to Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003), it is important to find this balance between “contextualising or positioning the ethnographer’s starting point”, and “accurately describing the social worlds of the participants” (p. xi).

One of the consequences of trying to find this ‘balance’ is, however, that the portraits often contain ‘interruptions’. This occurs because the research process and interpretations are woven through in conjunction with the voices and perspectives of the informants. These interruptions impact on the flow and the drawing together of actions and events; however, they ensure that context is included whilst highlighting insider perspectives that are relevant to the research question.

The portraits in this study are contextualised life histories largely in the words of the participants that illustrate the girls' aspirations and the social and cultural setting that shapes these. This sometimes requires the reader to interpret the key messages within the text. This is not unusual in life stories, as Wolcott (1983) explains:

“There should be a high ration of information in relation to explanation in a life story; sometimes there is no explanation or explicit interpretation at all.” (p. 8)

Although the girls' portraits sometimes need the reader to interpret the meanings within them, they include “in-depth data” in the words of the informants, which allows the reader to form their own understandings (see Tierney, 2009, p. 95). In some portraits, the reader may interpret the inclusion of ‘a long story’ as a ‘digression’; however, they are included, as they contain key messages that the reader may need to interpret themselves (see Riessman, 2002, p. 695). There are sometimes variations in the length of the portraits, in how the author is included in the text and in how the girls' own words are woven through the text. The variations are related largely to how the construction of the life history depended on “time, space and purpose” (Wolcott, 1983, p. 8) but they were additionally influenced by differences in how the girls related or articulated their stories. For example, some of the girls in this study were able to communicate their thoughts and feelings more clearly and in greater depth than others, so the personal narratives included in their portraits are more dominant or longer.

The life histories illustrate that the adolescent girls in this study are still making sense of ‘who they are’ and ‘who they want to become’. The way in which the girls tell their stories about their aspirations demonstrates how this is a time for self-discovery and growth, but also for exploring options that may ‘fit in’ with who they think they are. The often fragmented nature of the personal narratives contained within the portraits, where the girls tend to jump from one aspiration and explanation to the next and back again, is a direct reflection of what is happening inside their minds. The girls are trying to make sense of their current and future selves and their changing thoughts and feelings about what it is they actually want – and their own words within the life histories demonstrate this process. The following quote from Mann (1998), who constructed life histories of working class British girls, better articulates this point:

“Their lives are not remembered in tranquillity in the calm waters of late maturity but described in the full flood of experience, riding the rapids of tumultuous feelings.” (p. 82)

The portraits are constructed using the personal stories collected from all participants as well as the author’s observations and interpretations. They are therefore, to a certain degree, “something made” or “something fashioned” (Geertz, 1974, p. 15, as cited in Barone, 2007). This does not mean the stories are fictionalised (see Barone, 2007) or written in a way that transforms the girls into ‘characters’ that make for entertaining reading, this was not the purpose of the life history portraits. The purpose of the life histories was to focus on insights relevant to responding to the research question. As a result of this, the portraits are constructed to highlight how cultural worlds shape aspirations rather than to entertain the reader.

The life histories in the following chapter illustrate how aspects of ‘the self’, including identity and worldview, shape the girls’ aspirations and how this is a complex process that involves emotion, uncertainty and indecision. The portraits highlight how traditions, expectations, values, beliefs and understandings from within the girls’ cultural worlds impact on their aspirations and their capacity to fulfil them. How culture interconnects with other factors in the girls’ lives such as socio-economic status or social class, gender, rurality, interests, personality, and confidence may also be seen in the girls’ stories.

The life histories in this thesis show the connections between multiple aspirations and influences. They provide imagery of individual lives within a broader context than other research projects that focus on adolescent aspirations typically do. These life histories provide valuable insights into the lives and aspirations of the girls in this study. These may be found in Chapter Four as written cultural descriptions that give voice to a marginal cohort.

Reflections on the study

When the benefits of participation outweigh the risks

As is the case with any research there was potential for ethical issues to arise in this study. This section outlines how these were minimised, then details the known

benefits of participation. Prior to commencing any interviews in this study, informed consent was obtained and the author confirmed that participation was voluntary and not coerced. Consent was also obtained from the girls' parents for them to be involved in the research.

The author was not able to promise the participants anonymity because the Cradle Coast region is small, in terms of the population, and the communities in which the participants live are even smaller. So, it was always possible that someone the participants knew would become aware of their involvement in the study. In addition to this, the girls knew that their mothers and school principals were involved and vice versa. This happened because when the girls obtained the information and consent forms from their school principals they told them they were going to participate. School principals in the region also know a great deal about what is happening in the lives of their students and what is happening in their schools. In addition to this, it was possible that the participants would talk with others about the study or others would notice their involvement. Care has been taken by the author to protect the identities of all participants, with pseudonyms included in the thesis, and the names of places or identifiable landmarks changed. All participants realised, however, that the research would eventually be published and accessible and that there was a possibility they could be identified. Despite knowing this, none of the girls or adult participants withdrew from the study or requested that any information be omitted.

The author promised the girls that 'what was said' would not be disclosed to their mothers, their principals or anyone else *during the course of the research project*. The same promise was made to the adult participants. The author clarified with all participants, however, that it would be possible for anyone to access this information in the event that it became published. In knowing this, none of the participants opted to withdraw from the study or requested that any information be omitted. The author acknowledges that some material detailed in the life histories, however, may later impact on participants. References to tensions in the family, school and peer worlds are included in this thesis, which has the potential to be problematic for participants if they are identified following the publication of this work. Care to protect the identities of the participants is therefore an ongoing concern that the author will continue to consider beyond the course of the research project itself.

Other issues that were taken into consideration in this study, include those around ‘representation’, ‘authority’ and ‘legitimacy’ (see Atkinson et al., 2003; Cheek, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, 2008, 2003; Denzin & Giardina, 2008; Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). The measures employed to address these are briefly discussed here. The girls were provided with opportunities throughout the research process to play a leading role (particularly with the artefacts) and voice their thoughts, feelings and any concerns openly in a relaxed environment. This shifted the power to them and gave them more control and voice over the course of the research. The girls were provided with opportunities to omit material at any time or withdraw at any time over the course of the project, further allowing them to hold the balance of power. The adult participants were provided with the same opportunities. In the majority of the life histories, the girls’ own words form a large component of the portraits, allowing for their voices to be heard and for them to be represented in their own terms. Their lives have been accurately and truthfully represented in the portraits and are not fictionalised or glamorised in any way. It is also the author’s understanding, based on the amount of time spent with the girls, that the personal stories they shared were legitimate. The interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy and the interview transcripts were reviewed by all of the participants and their accuracy also confirmed. The author listened to the recordings of the interviews on at least two more occasions following the initial transcription to ensure familiarity with the data and accurate interpretation. This process ensured the author represented the meanings behind what the participants said in the right way.

The participants were all aware of the risks of participation and strategies were employed, including those discussed above, to ensure that ethical issues were minimised. It is the author’s belief, however, that in this research project the benefits outweigh the risks. The remainder of this section concentrates on the benefits of participating, especially for the girls.

Guided by a collection of personal stories shared by the girls in this study, it is proposed that this project was ‘a platform for discovering and sharing’. The artefact elicitation component of the research, along with the interviews, allowed the girls to discover more about themselves and their goals, and to share their inner thoughts and feelings. The research not only provided them with an opportunity to think more

deeply about their futures, their various identities and their values, but it also allowed them a space to share these thoughts with someone outside of their cultural worlds.

The ‘artefact template books’ allowed the girls to consider their aspirations in much greater depth than they had before and to lead discussions around this. The blank mind maps in these books put forward questions that most of the girls had not thought about in any detail before. This arguably stimulated a lot of new thinking and deeper consideration from the girls than a career or education planning session would have.

Participation in the research provided the opportunity for the girls to share their thoughts rather than battle with them in their own minds. Some of the girls communicated that they enjoyed creating the artefacts and sharing their ideas with someone. A few of the girls also reported a rise in confidence and emotional wellbeing that the author attributes to having the opportunity to be listened to and valued over the course of the research project. To highlight some of these benefits, examples of actual conversations about the research and quotes from the girls are included below.

The following example from Ave highlights how the research was seen as fun but at the same time provides her with a platform ‘*to share*’:

I had so much fun doing it. You should have seen me. I was absolutely loving it. To be able to share what I want to do is absolutely awesome. I don’t get to do it often.

This started several in-depth conversations that were led by Ave as she ‘talked through’ each of her artefacts for an hour and 40 minutes. The author prompted with interview questions in-between, but the conversation was mostly shaped by Ave’s descriptions of the artefacts and the meanings behind these. Ave wanted to share and this research provided her with that opportunity.

The study was a platform for expressing thoughts rather than keeping them internalised. During a conversation with Rose about subject options for Year 11, she tells the author that doing the research is good because *it makes you think more and you get it out instead of just having it up here [points to her head] and boiling over.*

Bianca is more to the point when referring to the artefact template book and participation in the research, simply stating, *it has made me think about things a bit more, it has been useful*. When talking about the study and the process of creating the artefacts Beth communicates the same message as Bianca when she tells the author, *it has given me more of an opportunity to think about what I wanted to do*. Similarly, during a concluding comment about her experience with this research, Lucy relates, *it's been really good, I've really enjoyed it*.

A different example of how it is good to talk with someone about your ideas and hopes comes from Grace. During our final interview when she tells the author what her initial thoughts were when she heard about the research, Grace states:

I was thinking it was going to be one of those stupid surveys where you go in there and say, 'oh yeah, this school's great, my teachers are great' and that sort of thing. Then when I came here [to the first interview] I thought, 'this is really cool'. It's actually been so good and just whenever I'm in bed just thinking about what we have talked about, I just think of things. And I'm like, 'wow, I'm really glad that we actually talked about that'. Even with, you know, your closest people, you don't just say, 'what's important to you'?

Participation in this research allowed the girls the opportunity to talk about current circumstances at home, at work, with friends and at school. At times these conversations led away from the research topic itself and became very personal as some experiences generated certain emotions. These conversations were most often about misunderstandings or disagreements with someone within the girls' family or peer worlds and how this made them feel. In these situations, the girls benefited by having the opportunity to talk to someone outside of their close circle of friends and family, knowing that the conversation would not leave the interview room or be included in the research. One example of this comes from Lauren at the end of the final interview following a conversation about how to protect herself from being upset by others, who says:

I like this [meeting for the research] because I can talk to you. And I know that it's not going to go back or no one's going to tell my mother or all of that sort of stuff.

Other examples include a particular conversation with Rose about a critical moment in her life and how this has impacted on the relationship that she has with her mother; various conversations with Bianca about conflict between her and her mother, and difficulties engaging with her school world; and conversations with Ella about how sometimes she struggles to keep a positive outlook on life.

A final example of what the research may have meant to the girls comes from a discussion with Ella during the final interview. The discussion stems from her questioning the author about what is required in a PhD. After the author explains the process and hoped-for outcomes, Ella responds with the following:

Wow, so it's taken you a long time to get to here? So, this is probably something that you have been really hanging out for. So, it's good that you're here and you're doing it. Wow, that's just amazing...so, you put a lot of work into this? I think this in itself is very inspiring. Just being a hard worker and working towards something and achieving it, I think that is very inspiring just in itself...it is very amazing what you are doing. I didn't realise how much work you guys put into this...it has made a difference to me. This is wicked. I am part of something special, like, this is not something that happens every day.

Ella feels inspired by the author's hard work but the benefits are more about how being part of the research has made her feel important – or part of something special. Taylor asks similar questions about what the author will do with the personal stories collected then on hearing the answer, responds with *yeah, that's cool*. Like Ella, Taylor is also pleased to be part of *something cool* that *is not something that happens every day*. Cleo and LJ do not make any direct references to their experiences in this study, but there are several occasions where the conversations with the author are in-depth and allow for them to be heard and seen.

Limitations of the study

The author aspires to be part of “a community that honors and celebrates paradigms and methodological diversity” and believes in moving towards “research agendas that advance human rights and social justice through qualitative research” (Denzin & Giardina, 2010, p. 36). The nature of this study is highly qualitative and exploratory,

enabling for depth, detail and a culturally contextualised understanding of adolescent aspirations. As a consequence, depth and detail are captured that enable for ‘insights’, but the research approach does not allow for generalisations to be made (see Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, 2008, 2003).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), “qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive” (p. 14), it allows for ‘rich descriptions’, for ‘the insider’s point of view’ to be captured and for an understanding of ‘the constraints of everyday life’. Qualitative approaches enable for detail and ‘insights’, but the findings from this type of research cannot be interpreted as ‘hard evidence’ (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In this study a highly qualitative approach was seen as necessary, but the author acknowledges that there are limitations with such approaches that are associated with the generalisability of the findings (see Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, 2008, 2003).

4. Lives in context

“Indeed, because of the very intervention of the ‘other’ in the elicitation of life histories, we must consider the issue of the constructive nature of the life history text itself within the encounter situation, involving the informant and his interlocutor.” (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985, p. 3)

Life history portraits

This chapter contains a selection of the life history portraits of the adolescent girls in this study. The portraits are within the genre of the life history, as they describe the girls’ lives, in part, and within the broader cultural, social and historical context (see Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985). The life histories include the perspectives of the informants, insights into daily life and descriptions of the broader socio-cultural context, as well as descriptions of the research process itself (see Chase, 2005; Plummer, 2001; Tierney, 2009). The girls’ portraits respond to the research question, as they enable insights into how cultural worlds impact on ‘the self’ and how they impact on ‘cultural capacities’ and subsequently aspirations.

The nature of this research is highly qualitative and ethnographic to allow for detailed descriptions, ‘insider perspectives’ and an understanding of the worldviews of the informants (see Madden, 2010). The research is therefore exploratory, and broad generalisations and conclusions are not able to be drawn from the girls’ portraits (see Bettie, 2002). The portraits do, however, allow for insights into how numerous factors are interwoven in the socio-cultural context to impact on the girls’ lives and aspirations. They further enable an understanding of the meanings behind the girls’ thoughts and their planned actions. Particular ‘commonalities’ appear across the girls’ portraits that allow for insights into some of their ‘shared aspirations’ and ‘shared factors of influence’. The focus of this chapter, however, is to concentrate on each individual portrait and the messages within these.

The life histories provide for an understanding of adolescent lives within a broader context than do many existing research projects that focus on aspirations. In this thesis, decisions about structure and style are largely impacted on by time, purpose and space (see Wolcott, 1983). The rationale for the structure and style of the life histories is more extensively detailed and justified in Chapter Three; however, in short, the portraits are largely influenced by a combination of the life writing styles of Harry Wolcott (1983), William Tierney (2009) and Thomas Barone (1989), and their inclusion of the author in the text; this is despite the fact these researchers are all from different disciplinary backgrounds. The portraits are mostly reflective of Tierney's (2009) portrait style, as they include the research process and Wolcott's (1983) life story style that contains personal narratives. The following life histories do not include an extensive analysis of the key messages in connection with the existing literature. This allows the reader to make his/her own interpretations and draw his/her own conclusions throughout (see Tierney, 2009).

Rose Robinson – The sky's the limit

It's the start of the school day in the middle of July. I park across the road from Chapman District High School in the centre of a small rural farming community and make my way inside to meet Rose. The town is situated approximately 20 kilometres inland from a regional centre and many people are employed in technical and trade positions or as managers or labourers. The place is renowned for its art, craft, local produce and centralised position regarding various tourist attractions. Following intensive questioning by the administration staff as to what my business is at the school, I am guided to a meeting room situated at the front of the building.

Rose soon pokes her head around the side of the door. She raises her eyebrows and I confirm that I am 'the girl from the uni' and invite her in to take a seat. Rose has thick, long black hair and blue eyes, and is wearing a school counsellor jacket that also sports a house captain pin. Today is the first interview with Rose and it begins with a conversation about the research. I explain the research project and invite Rose to respond to questions on a sheet that focus on school subjects, interests and her family, which she does willingly. She talks openly as she writes down answers on the sheet and I learn a lot about her from this conversation.

Rose is 15 years old and in her final year of high school. She lives just outside of town with her mother and second eldest sister who is currently attending college. Despite being the younger of the two girls at home, Rose prepares and cooks the meals and takes care of other chores most weeknights, as her mother works late. Rose has another sister who is 21 and a recent graduate of the police academy. Her parents separated when she was a young girl and she visits her father sometimes on weekends. Neither of her parents has any formal educational qualifications; however, Rose's mother works in a supervisory role at a tourist resort and her father manages a small farm.

Rose loves school and is heavily engaged in all aspects of school and community life. She works part-time in a local bakery and has done so since the beginning of Grade 8. Rose also regularly babysits for a female friend of the family and house-cleans for an elderly man. In later interviews Rose describes herself as *bubbly, outgoing, independent and confident* and also explains, *I'm just your average person...I have the time for everyone and I don't judge...I do the best I can with what I've got...I am an individual. I am not patient...and I am very stubborn. I am a hard worker too. I don't expect anything for nothing, like, I work for it.* I realise towards the end of our time together that Rose isn't always as confident as she thinks and she also likes to have time by herself.

Between the first and second interviews with Rose, I meet with her school principal. We discuss various school experiences and programs. The principal also shares his perceptions regarding the values, expectations and aspirations of the wider community and parents. He describes the community *as very diverse, ranging from people living alternative lifestyles to people living on farms.* He also explains how a *fair percentage* of those in the community are unemployed or receiving welfare.

From his point of view, most people in the community have a *country-type view* that university isn't the best pathway for their children. He suggests that this could partly be because parental aspirations are for their children to work locally, *probably on a farm or in timber or something like that.* Despite there being a *small percentage of parents who think tertiary education is valuable*, the principal also believes that most of the parents in the community *do not regard education highly enough.*

The normal post Year 10 pathway for students at Rose's school includes progressing on to senior secondary college, an apprenticeship or a traineeship. The principal reports a 95 per cent retention into Year 11 but quickly adds, *whether they continue throughout the whole of the year is probably a different story*. The norm of leaving college in Year 11 is also something that Rose mentions to me in a later interview. Despite this, the principal relates that the school has a tradition of *doing very well* in Years 11 and 12 and states that they *always have a dozen or so kids feature in the [college] awards night*.

The first time that Rose and I talk about her aspirations is at the end of our initial meeting. The conversation starts when I mention the artefact elicitation component of the research project. I show Rose the template book and she looks down at the first blank mind map titled 'My aspirations'. She shrugs her shoulders, lets out a sigh and says, *I change my mind every day*. So I ask, "Do you? So, what do you think would pop into your head right now?" Rose responds with the following,

Well, I want to be a police officer. I wanna be like my older sister up there. I look up to her a lot. I want to be a school teacher because Mrs Harris is just everything you could ever dream of. If I could be half the woman she is, she's just amazing. And I want to be a nurse and I want to go to the army. And be a nurse in the army. And every day it changes.

This is the beginning of many in-depth conversations with Rose about her experiences and her aspirations. We discuss the artefact template book and Rose tells me that she wants to create some of her own pages and bring them to the next interview. We set a date for the second interview that allows Rose time to work on some artefacts.

It is a month after the first meeting with Rose and she finds me waiting in the career planner's office at the start of recess. She looks prepared and eager to begin. Rose has her career plans from Years 8 and 10 and the artefact template book that I gave her. She sits next to me at the desk and spreads out her artefacts. She tells me she is excited about today and has enjoyed preparing the artefacts.

Rose begins by reading me her entire Grade 8 career plan with amusement, as it is written by a younger Rose. I listen to Rose read and I don't ask any questions. Rose

then starts to read her Grade 10 plan and I see that it is similar to her Grade 8 career plan. It includes aspirations for college, university, nursing and the armed forces, and contains answers to many questions about how Rose might achieve these goals. I interrupt her reading at the end of the first page and ask from where she got the idea to go to university and she replies,

Well, originally I thought I could finish Grade 11 and 12 and go straight into the army, that would have been a possibility, but then I thought about the whole nursing thing...anyway, for me to be able to do that [be a nurse in the army] it requires me finishing Years 11 and 12 and doing a bachelor degree in nursing...and that's what is sort of holding me off a bit. Like I can't just sit, well, I didn't think I was the sort of person who could do uni. I didn't think I could hack it...

I learn from Rose at a later time that the idea to go to university also stems from school trips to campuses and listening to other students share their experiences of tertiary study. Today, though, we have a lengthy conversation about Rose's army aspiration. I ask Rose where the idea to join the army came from and she says,

I don't know, it's always been there...with the army, I don't know, I just want to get away and come back a different person. I think there is something about the army, something about going away and coming back. I don't know. It's something about going away; it's not the army itself, I don't think. It's something about leaving and coming back. I can see it. I can see myself going and doing it all and then I can see myself coming back like a different person. I don't know. I am the sort of person that needs to be independent. Like, I am a real independent person and there is something about finishing school, finishing all that and then leaving. I don't know. I just want to go. And I want to be by myself. And figure myself out I think. And then come back and do [pauses] it's weird though. Yeah, I've just got something that I need to do for myself and figure myself out.

Rose talks about *going away* to the army and *doing it all*, *figuring herself out* and then returning as *a different person*. The terminology Rose uses when talking about the army suggests that she sees this as an opportunity for self discovery, experience and growth. A deeper analysis of the language and underlying motivations to aspire to the

army also suggest that Rose sees this as an environment that she could identify with, more so than the classroom environment. Rose is not averse to learning – just unsure where that learning will take place and what kind of learning best suits her.

I conclude from this that Rose's desires to discover more about the person she is and experience something different are the main reasons for her army aspiration. Rose also mentions a visit to the school by armed forces recruitment personnel and I assume this has played some part in placing the idea in her mind. Rose tells me that going to the army is the most important aspiration on her list, but says, *I think it's something that I wouldn't do forever. I think it would be an experience more than a career.*

We talk further and in more depth about all of Rose's future goals. Rose reiterates that she wants to become a police officer and adds, *pretty much just because my sister is.* She says that the aspiration has something to do with having power, but probably more to do with *looking after people and being able to play some small part in something...being able to somehow better things.* Rose reaffirms her teacher aspiration is because of Mrs Harris whom she respects and looks up to, but adds that she values education and *it is the best thing ever.* She tells me that she loves children but isn't sure if she has the patience to be a teacher. This is one example of how personality traits may be seen as having an influence on career aspirations. Rose believes the nursing idea is linked to her army aspiration but also explains that one of her female cousins is a nurse and that she likes the idea of caring for other people.

Rose can identify with the idea of police work through her sister, school teaching through one of the female teachers at her high school and nursing through a female cousin. This suggests that because Rose can identify with these future occupational roles through exposure to them in her cultural world, she may therefore see them as valuable aspirations or possibilities for her.

The deeper meaning behind these career aspirations becomes even clearer in the third interview. This happens when I ask Rose what she thinks she will actually do. Rose looks at me for further explanation and I say, "Well, out of all of your aspirations,

what do you realistically see yourself doing or being?” After looking at me blankly and digesting what I have just asked her, Rose responds with,

Maybe if I do like the whole sociology and psychologist thing and work at like a shelter or something. Giving is something that I'm really passionate about. And well giving, that's in the nursing, that's in the school teaching, that's in the police officering. And I think that's why I have come to those. They are big things. Like I think that is what is expected of me. To be a big thing. My mum, she's got a lot of expectations of me, but I think she just expects me to have this fabulous career without having to do the hard work to get it - without having to go to uni, like my older sister with what she is doing in the police force.

Above, Rose connects ‘giving’ with doing something ‘big’ and her mother’s expectations. The expectation to ‘give’ may therefore be a powerful influencing factor and raises questions about gender-specific expectations. Interestingly enough, I later learn that a caring role that involves helping others could also be a maternal expectation.

During the second interview, Rose continues to use the many mind maps in her book as a prompt for discussing all of her life pursuits, including those outside of careers and education. I learn from this that Rose has multiple aspirations. Some of these include travel, taking a gap year and volunteering for humanitarian aid work in Africa. Rose connects wanting to travel with her mother’s recent experiences of travelling to Thailand and America.

Rose explains that she wants to take a gap year *to be free* and I notice that it is written on one of her artefacts in the same balloon as ‘travel’. Rose says that she wants to volunteer for humanitarian aid work in Africa because she found out about it through *a lady that came to the school...who goes to Cambodia...who helped and was successful in what she did*. Other more immediate aspirations Rose expresses are *to be content with who I am as a person* which she says is *going to be hard work* as well as *move out of home and become more independent and give to the less fortunate*.

Rose shows me the artefact template titled “After Grade 10 I want to”, and talks me through what she has written. I learn from Rose that in addition to what she has

already told me, she *hopes to get her driver's licence, buy a car, save money, go to Queensland with friends, work part-time and do well in college exams* so that she has *enough points to get into uni*, if that's what she decides to do. Rose turns the page over and shows me the template titled "After Grade 12 but before I am thirty". I see that Rose has written, *probably have a gap year and TRAVEL, HAVE A CAR, HOUSE, Uni??* Rose has also written, *by the time I am thirty I see myself in a successful career, not clear of exactly what and by the time I'm thirty I'd like to be married and starting a family*. I also learn from Rose that she wants *to live a happy and successful life and live life to the full*.

Rose talks about her post-college gap year plans and how she wants to have *nothing to worry about*. She further explains that she looks forward to *not being expected to do anything*. Rose talks about her travel plans and how she wants to *experience and see*. She explains that her plans for aid work are based around wanting to help and I wonder if this has something to do with her wanting to *play some small part in something*. We talk about Rose's early adulthood aspirations and from the language that Rose uses, I connect many of them, except for those surrounding education, to her underlying motivations for self discovery.

Rose explains that she believes happiness is the most important thing in life and that happiness will bring you success. She further relates that, *Success is for me, doing something that you love. Doing something that means a lot to you. And money isn't success you know*. We talk a lot about this. Rose goes on to say that she told her mother she wants to be a teacher and her mum said, *but there's no money in that*. She then tells me,

Like you need money and I realise that but money isn't happiness and I have seen that. I've seen that money can't do you any good, like you need it but... and nursing is good money and it would get me a house and it would give me stability, but would I be happy? Yeah, so as long as I am happy.

We talk about the things that Rose may need to do if she wants to fulfil her goals in life and who can help her to do this. She reads out from her Grade 10 career plan and says that she needs to get good grades in high school, college and university, and that

it is really up to her to make it all happen. Rose talks about needing the support of family and friends but emphasises that it will ultimately come down to her own hard work, confidence and persistence. As we continue to talk about her career plan Rose comments, *I think a lot of it, a lot of this, is about me. And discovering myself sort of thing. Who I am and what I am here for.*

Guided by the career plan, which was written at the beginning of the year, Rose discusses the possible barriers in the way of her fulfilling her aspirations. These include her grades and her limited understanding and enjoyment of science, which she believes could make nursing a difficult aspiration to fulfil. On her career plan she had written a solution to this barrier would be to work harder and to do more advanced science in Grade 10. Rose then looks up from the career plan and says sharply, *well, that isn't exactly working out for me at the moment.* She is upset about this situation. Rose tells me that she puts a lot of pressure on herself and feels that she must take responsibility for everything that happens to her. We talk about this for a long time. During this conversation I learn about a turning point in Rose's life.

When Rose was half way through Grade 7 and living in another town and attending another school, a serious breach of trust turned into a traumatic experience for her. This triggers a chain of events that sees a young Rose move to a new town and a new school. Rose finds great comfort and engagement in the new school. Doors open for her with the new norm being increased learning opportunities and positive schooling experiences. We talk more about her old school at a later time and Rose says,

At Milton there wasn't as many opportunities [pauses]. You didn't go to other colleges to have taster days [pauses]. You would sign the No Dole Charter and say, 'I'm not gonna be on the dole'...and then one out of ten of the people there were probably doing something and the other nine were probably on the dole, doing nothing, or doing a bit of farm work on the weekend or something...so, it really did, like, wake me up a bit coming here...

We talk about the positive experiences and the people at the school she now attends and many other aspects of life in this new town. Rose believes that the last three years in a different town and a different school has better prepared her for college. I wonder

how much the change of place and new experiences have led Rose to want more than 'going on the dole'. I also wonder if Rose being upset in the interview is triggered by the realisation that she has come a long way and may not now get over the line with her grades. When Rose talks about the traumatic experience she had, she also tells me that she feels responsible and thinks her mother will never trust her again. She then relates that one of her underlying hopes is for her mother to be proud of her. I assume that Rose is partly driven by the affective aspiration to please her mum, to make her proud.

We continue to talk about the barriers and difficulties in knowing what subjects to choose next year. Rose tells me it is good to *get it out instead of just having it up here [points to her head] and boiling over* and I learn that she feels anxious and confused about her future. I decide that the anxiety she feels about her grades is one reason why she now starts to talk about aspirations to do something associated with sociology and psychology; as these don't necessarily have the same science components as nursing. This illustrates how, for Rose, her science grades may lead to a compromise, or change, in her educational or career plans. We discuss college and the subjects that interest Rose, for a long time. An announcement comes over the speakers that surprises us both and prompts our decision to schedule a time for the third interview.

It's late in October and I'm in an office at the front of Chapman District High waiting for Rose. Rose looks different today as her long black hair is pulled back into a pony tail and she is wearing shorts and a t-shirt. I see a sporty side to her that I had not noticed before. We talk about a book, *Mercy*, that Rose carries in with her and then she tells me about her recent work experience at the veterinary clinic in town. I laugh as she talks animatedly about learning how to do a pregnancy test on a cow. I give Rose a copy of the transcription from interviews one and two and we talk about these. We look at the photographs of the artefacts and I joke with Rose about adding 'vet' to the aspirations mind map. Rose laughs and says, *No, it was just a really good experience, it was great.*

We talk about the students at the school and how most normally decide to go to college but withdraw midway through Year 11. Rose relates her own family traditions regarding education and tells me that her parents did not attend college, her eldest

sister went but didn't complete and her second eldest sister is currently at college but considering withdrawing. Despite this, Rose believes that it is important to obtain a college education and it is expected of her by her mother. In one of our earlier meetings, Rose explains that her eldest sister did not have to go to university to become a police officer and her other sister does not want to go, and finishes with, *so, that makes me want to be the one that goes to uni.*

As part of the fieldwork I also meet with Rose's mother. We talk about her hopes for her daughter and I ask her what she expects Rose to do with her education and she says, *I don't know. She's got the ability there. She's yeah, she's quite bright. I think she will go on to years 11 and 12 but after that I don't know.* Rose's mum tells me that she believes Rose will do well with whatever she chooses to do and that will be *something totally different.* I ask her why she thinks Rose will do something totally different and she says, *to be recognised.* She also sees her daughter *in a role where she will care for others.*

Rose also tells me that she wants to be different. So much so, that she would consider not doing something if it was expected of her. Rose relates that Mrs Harris said to her, *I could picture you being a nurse* and explains, *that makes me want to go out and not be a nurse and do something completely different...and say, "you thought I couldn't do this and I'm doing this"...that's how I am. And I think it's the expectation thing. Like, what they want me to do, I don't want to do.* I learn that outside of her family world the expectation and encouragement for Rose to attend college, at minimum, is also held by the woman she had mentioned at our first meeting, whose children she babysits. We talk about this and Rose mentions,

We are really close and I can talk to her about anything. She gives me advice and she just said, "you know, you get to Year 11 and 12 and there is nothing you can do but make your way through, you've got to think about you, you've got to keep your head screwed on..."

We talk about these expectations and I sense that a part of Rose wants to be different from everybody else and another part wants to be the same. There is only one male who Rose mentions in any of our conversations about her future hopes and this

happens when we are talking about the expectations of others. This is her mother's boyfriend Rick, whom she also works with. She explains that Rick said to her, *you're a hard worker, you use your initiative, and you will do anything that you want to do* and then Rose tells me *that means a lot because for him to say that is massive*.

I discover from Rose that despite the fragile relationship she has with Rick, his confidence in her has made an impact. I wonder if the recognition from him makes her more determined to go on and do college. I learn that her friends teasing her about rushing to class as soon as the bell rings makes her more determined to achieve her goals. I also learn that Rose does not believe that any of her future plans are influenced at all by her friends. Rose relates that she does not consider them close friends and does not see them outside of school hours. A falling out between her and some of her friends has upset Rose, but not her plans for the future.

Rose sees very few barriers in the way to her achieving her goals. We talk about a range of possible hurdles, including structural constraints and Rose suggests that she can overcome all of these through hard work and determination. In this sense, there is a very individualistic feel to Rose's story, but on closer analysis there are many potential barriers, Rose just doesn't see these. The barriers that she does see are her science grades, being able to concentrate on her learning and *having enough money*. Rose sees money as something that may be a barrier to fulfilling all of her aspirations but says she would never use it as an excuse. Rose does not perceive gender as making any difference to what she aspires for or is able to achieve but explains that she is aware of gender expectations. I ask Rose what she thinks people expect of females and she says, *they don't think it's the normal thing to be out and doing something for yourself*.

We talk about Rose's philosophical views on life and I ask her if she lives by any particular motto or belief and after a while Rose says,

If you love what you are doing, you will be successful. Yeah, I tell myself that all the time...If I am happy with myself, happy with my life and happy with what I have achieved then I see myself as being a success. And I am a strong believer in that, like, being happy will bring me success...not things like a career or money. But things that

have brought me success as a person. And another one is, “if it’s to be, then it is up to me”.

Rose also believes that *the sky’s the limit*. We talk about this idea and I wonder how much this belief shapes Rose’s many and varied aspirations. I prompt her a little further and Rose says, *I just keep telling myself that anything’s possible and the sky’s the limit and if I want it, I can get it*. Rose’s worldview is that there are no boundaries to what you can do in life. This belief stems from the experiences she has had and is arguably at the core of the reasoning behind her many aspirations.

In terms of her worldview and wanting to contribute, give, help, make a difference or do *something big*, this seems to be a theme that runs across many of her aspirations, such as those for the caring careers, the army, humanitarian aid work and motherhood, for example. Rose’s desires to contribute are also interconnected with her aspirations for happiness, success and fulfilment. Motivations for self discovery and determining the person she is and wants to be, or wanting to engage in ‘identity work’ also appears to be shaping Rose’s army aspirations and other aspirations for early adulthood outside of those for education. This suggests that desire to discover the person she is and wants to become plays a significant role in influencing her pathway decision-making.

Along with identity and worldview, Rose’s story also illustrates how other aspects of culture, such as norms, traditions, values and expectations may come into the aspirations picture. For example, it shows that there is an undervaluing of education amongst many in her local community, a school-to-work tradition that occurs on the completion of Year 10 or midway through Year 11 and a family expectation to secure a job locally rather than go on to higher education. Rose’s story also highlights a maternal expectation to follow the footsteps of her older sister in terms of securing a career early in life and one that involves ‘giving’ or ‘helping’, which suggests tradition is an underlying variable at play. What is not known, however, is whether or not these aspects of culture impact on Rose’s eventual decisions about her education or career pathway or any of her other pathway options.

Rose's aspirations are fuelled by her philosophical viewpoint that *the sky's the limit* and she is motivated by a deep set belief that *if it's to be, it's up to me*. Rose sees no barriers apart from herself. I wonder if Rose has the necessary social, economic, academic and cultural capital to fulfil her many aspirations. Or the individual or cultural capacity to do this. This is something that I will never know. I also wonder how close her eventual career pathway will be to the traditionally female occupations that are typically associated with wanting to *help others*. Or how close it will be to something that sees her *play some small part in something*.

Will Rose do what her mother predicts she will do? Will she do *something totally different to be recognised*? Will Rose negotiate her various identities and navigate pathways that lead her towards fulfilling those goals closest to her heart such as being happy, successful, self-reliant and independent? Will Rose achieve these underlying aspirations through making some sort of contribution and receiving recognition and a sense of fulfilment?

No one can predict what pathway/s Rose will eventually take; however, during my time with her, the desire to discover the person that she is and wants to be through *going away and coming back a different person* is very strong in her. The desire to be or do *something different* also comes through as a powerful motivating factor. I wonder if Rose will choose to follow the pathway into the armed forces as this is an environment she sees as fulfilling her immediate desires for self-discovery that is also *something different* without having to go to university. University is *something different* in her community, school, family and peer worlds, but the university environment is not one that Rose is currently able to identify with as a place for personal growth. The army pathway allows Rose to still be different from everybody else, to go away and to experience and grow. This is what is most important to Rose at this point in time and I wonder if this will impact on her immediate pathway decision-making.

Cleo Thomas – If at first you don't succeed, try, try again

I am sitting in my car outside an isolated high school in the Cradle Coast region. It is not only wet, but it is also cold and miserable. There is no sunshine and heavy grey

clouds hide most of the mountains. I wait until the rain eases and make a run for the undercover area. I enter the school and the administration staff inform me that the school principal is no longer available today as planned. He has left a message that Cleo is still expecting me. I am led into an empty classroom with limited materials in the room apart from a few books and posters. Inside the walls of Kilpatrick District High School, I begin to prepare for my first interview with Cleo.

Cleo finds me midway through setting up for our first meeting. She enters the classroom in a bouncing manner with an excited smile. As she enters the room I am surprised that she doesn't trip over from excitement before she reaches the table. Cleo has short, dark brown hair and a pale round face. In later interviews she tells me she is iron deficient and lacking in vitamin D, which may in part explain this paleness. She is wearing a pair of tight black jeans and a white polo, which looks too big for her. I later learn that this is a student-initiated modification to the school uniform.

Cleo is in Grade 10 and the youngest in her class, and doesn't turn 16 until the end of the year. She comes across today and in future interviews as being younger than this. I think this is partly connected to her personality. For example, during our third interview, Cleo tells me that her friends would describe her as *crazy, insane, cheerful, happy, giggly and bubbly* and she believes that *being crazy* is her *appeal*. I have to say that during my time with Cleo I see some of these characteristics, especially the *bubbly* and the *giggly*, but I also see that this is not always there. Sometimes Cleo's mood is flat or she is distracted, which I notice more so in the second interview.

Before I have the chance to introduce myself, Cleo sits down and tells me that she wants to be a journalist or an artist. She takes an A4 art book out of her bag and shows me her work. The art book contains many grey-lead drawings of animated characters, not all that dissimilar to what you would see in a 'Manga' movie. She looks for my approval and we talk about the drawings. I learn later that Cleo gets some of her ideas from online 'learn to draw' sites. We discuss a school competition that Cleo has entered and she shows me a photograph of a painting, and I ask her, "How did you do this?" Cleo proudly replies, *paint on a blank canvas, no lines or anything...* and tells me in great detail about her passion for art and writing. She says that she will bring

the article that she wrote for Mr Douglas to the next interview. I learn that Cleo has prioritised her plans for journalism above those to become an artist:

My first passion was to be an artist. But then I thought, well, I could have a side business as a card maker or paintings or something like that and have my main business as journalism, or story writing. Because I like writing and explaining things that have happened to people. I don't like to be seen much, but I like to write and I like people reading what I write. And when we do newspaper articles in class and stuff like that I get really excited and am like, here you go. Straight away it's done.

I realise that Cleo is excited to have an 'outsider' interested in her life, her aspirations and her relatively isolated world. After today's interview, we meet again for two more interviews. I also meet with her school principal. From these interviews, I have constructed Cleo's life story with a concentration on her aspirations for the future.

Cleo Lindsay Thomas was born on 20 December 1995. The first four years of her life were spent in a remote mining community in the Cradle Coast region with her mother, father and two older sisters. Following the separation of her parents prior to starting kindergarten, she moved from one rural farming community in the region to the next. During this time Cleo sometimes lived with her mother and sometimes with her father. Following her 14th birthday and prior to starting Grade 9, Cleo moved again, but this time to another remote mining community in the Cradle Coast region. Cleo enrolled at Kilpatrick District High School, which caters to the needs of students from her hometown of Forrest Falls as well as to the needs of students from surrounding areas.

According to Cleo's principal, the school community consists of towns that are all *low socio-economic status* and there is a *high level of poverty and social disadvantage* in these towns. He further relates that though many families are *chronically unemployed and have been for generations*, there are also some professional, high-income families and therefore a *full range of students and student ability* at the school. Due to low student numbers (less than 150 students), I am told by the principal that the school is limited in what educational offerings it can provide and focuses largely on literacy, numeracy and emotional wellbeing.

The principal tells me that most students at Cleo's school typically decide to enrol in college, but about one-quarter withdraw at Easter. In this year's Grade 10 cohort of sixteen students, the school principal suspects that only 11 are likely to go to college to begin with. The upside for those not wanting to participate in college is that the local mine employs 12 trainees per year at an annual starting salary of \$75,000. These traineeships are first offered to those local youngsters who have completed Year 12 studies, followed by those in Year 11 and then those who have finished Year 10. So, depending on the circumstances each year, it is possible to secure a \$75,000 traineeship straight out of high school. The principal relates that he himself has encouraged his daughter to apply for a traineeship at the mine.

The principal believes that the wider community and students at the school value the more practical subjects such as woodwork, horticulture and cooking. If he had the resources, he explains that he would offer more practical classes and work experience. In saying this, he also tells me that the school offer a great deal of online learning and tries to provide the students with as many opportunities as possible. Some of these include wilderness/adventure camps and various excursions or experiences outside of the local area. Attendance rates at the school are well below the national and state average. This may be attributed to many things; however, during our discussions the principal mentions an undervaluing of education and a community aspiration along the lines of *staying in a town and being with your family, meeting a miner and maybe finding a bit of work, maybe starting a family...* which may explain, in part, the low attendance levels.

Cleo is currently midway through Grade 10 and dreaming about the possibilities outside of Forrest Falls. She lives with her mother, who is head of security at one of the mines, and her mother's boyfriend, who is an underground miner. Her father lives 90 kilometres away and works for a construction company that supplies machinery to the mines. Cleo's mother attended college and her father left school at the end of Grade 10. She is not sure if either of them have any formal qualifications. I assume from our conversations, however, that between the two of them they earn an average income. Cleo has a strong bond with her mother and speaks highly of her father. Along with wanting to be a journalist (or a novelist) and an artist, Cleo wants to be

like her mother and tells me that this is because she is *a pretty strong, independent woman who is very successful*.

Cleo has an older sister who is in her early twenties who lives with her boyfriend and their young daughter. She does not see them as often as she would like to as this involves a three-hour drive from Forrest Falls. She has another sister who lives on campus at Gilchrist College through the week and returns home most weekends. Cleo has a boyfriend, Tommy, who is in Grade 9 and with whom she is clearly smitten. Most of her time is taken up with him and his family who she says treat her like *the daughter they don't have*. Cleo has hopes to one day marry and have children with Tommy, who she tells me would make *an awesome dad*. This belief stems from watching him look after his younger brothers. I learn that Cleo wants children because of her experiences with Tommy and his little brothers but also because she loves looking after her niece.

Cleo hopes to attend Gilchrist College and live on campus like her sisters both did. She connects this with two other aspirations, which are to *gain some independence and a little bit of freedom*. Her reasons for wanting to go to university are purely to obtain the necessary qualifications to become a journalist. She tells me that she has her heart set on writing *the big stories for the big wigs*. Cleo appears to have a romantic vision of journalism that includes Lois Lane and Clarke Kent. This may be related to not having had any exposure to the real world of journalism, apart from what she has seen on television and been asked to do in English class. In saying this, if it wasn't for exposure to the idea in her school world, I doubt that Cleo would be aspiring for a career as a journalist or novelist to begin with.

Her love of writing and self belief that she is good at it are also motivators behind this career idea. I learn from Cleo that Mr Douglas, her English teacher, has told her that she is *awesome at writing* and another teacher has said to her that she has *a real talent for writing*. I realise that the idea has not only been shaped by her school experiences but it has also been reinforced and encouraged through the school world. Cleo talks fondly of Mr Douglas and I learn that he has told Cleo that she has *a way with words*. From our conversations I come to understand that this recognition has been particularly influential.

Cleo also believes there is an expectation for more girls *to get the lines out and have the stories* because in her opinion, *girls seem to have a better way with words than guys*. It appears this gender expectation that Cleo has connected to journalism stems from her own experiences in the classroom. The fact that no one in her family has taken the pathway before is also appealing to Cleo, who communicates that she wants to be *doing something different*. There are also other underlying motivations for a career in journalism that are related to recognition and desires to help and to be fair. For example, Cleo tells me that she believes it would be *an honour to get the big stories and help out* and also to *report the truth*. Cleo also mentions wanting to find out *the actual facts* and *tell both sides of the story*.

The idea to become an artist has come from Cleo's mother who she tells me is *pretty good at art*. She also tells me that her sister *is good at art too* and that *it's just in the family basically*. Cleo believes that it is a toss up between her best friend Sarah, who she relates *is a phenomenal artist* and her mother when it comes to the biggest influence on her wanting to pursue this aspiration. She tells me that her mother would like her to pursue it because it is something that she loves and is good at. Cleo also believes she is good at art and finds it easy to do.

Cleo's other aspirations include wanting to be more mature, to venture outside Forrest Falls, to lose weight, to gain more confidence and to showcase her talents. Cleo wants *to grow up* because her mother and sisters tell her she needs to. She wants to one day travel to Egypt because of the television show *Stargate* and reading old Egyptology books at her father's house. Sometime in the next three or four years Cleo also hopes to move to Cairns with Tommy and his family and says she may go to university there. Cleo connects going to Cairns with being able *to get out* which is an aspiration in its own right.

When Cleo talks about Forrest Falls and the Cradle Coast, however, I sense that she has an attachment to the place and a certain level of concern about being too far away from home. I assume from this that she hasn't actually pictured herself venturing that far away or thought about it in any detail, even though the aspiration is there. It also appears that '*getting out*' and/or studying away from home are ideas that Cleo will entertain only if they involve Tommy being around, or at least a friend. Cleo wants to

lose weight for the leavers' dinner in November and she tells me that she has been going to the gym. She associates this goal with gaining more confidence and wanting to *get out there and be seen*.

Doing this, she explains, would enable her to fulfil her mother's expectations. When I ask her what she thinks her mother expects her to do, she says, *get something good happening in my life and get out of my shell*. Cleo's mother lost more than 20 kilos and is the driving force behind Cleo's weight loss goal. Cleo sees her mother as a role model who is supportive and I have a strong feeling that Cleo wants to please her mother more than anyone else.

Cleo believes that the most likely barrier in the way of fulfilling her aspirations is not having enough confidence. Her academic achievement is another factor, as Cleo has some doubts around her mathematics grades and her society and history Grades. The former she attributes to her own ability and the latter she attributes to the teacher and the subjects. I learn that Cleo has had several disagreements with the teacher of these subjects and has not performed as well as she would have liked. She tells me that she believes this could affect her being eligible for a scholarship for Grade 11. I ask if this could impact on her being able to move away from home to go to college. Cleo explains that her mother will receive a grant from the mine to assist with college costs so it will be okay.

I wonder if Cleo will strive to fulfil her mother's expectations to *get out of her shell* and *get something good happening in her life*. I also wonder if she will strive to fulfil her father's expectations, which she explains are to *follow her dreams, get a good job, settle down, and have a good life*. Cleo explains that her father doesn't want her to have the job insecurities that he has had over the years. This may be one of the reasons why Cleo talks about wanting *a good job with good money*. She also talks about money as something that will bring her success.

When I ask Cleo what her vision is of living 'a good life', she says, *a good life for me would be like pursuing my dreams and even if I don't get them, be happy that I tried...* I then ask Cleo, "What are your dreams?" And she says, *journalism, kids and*

marriage. Not necessarily in that order. Maybe marriage, journalism, kids. Maybe, depending on which one takes off first.

Cleo tells me that she lives by the motto, *if at first you don't succeed, try, try, again*. I learn from Cleo that she sees many possibilities for herself in life and that this is largely as her favourite teacher, Mr Douglas, told her she has *the skill and ability to do anything*. She therefore relates to me that she believes that if she puts her *mind to it and works hard enough*, she will accomplish her ambitions. The most important things in Cleo's life, she tells me, are her mother and her family, her boyfriend and his family, and her education. Cleo explains to me that she values and needs the comfort and support of these people. She also tells me that she values education because she knows that schooling is necessary if she is to fulfil her ambitions to become a journalist. I am unsure where Cleo's value for education comes from, but it appears to be something that has stemmed from her recent experiences within the school world. This is because two of her teachers as well as the school principal provide Cleo with encouragement to continue with her writing.

Cleo's focus is on her short-term affective goals for *freedom* and *independence* that she envisions as happening for her when she leaves home to go to college. She is also very focused on her boyfriend Tommy and her circle of friends. When Cleo talks about her aspirations, she has not prioritised one over the other and is open to the idea of them occurring in any order, just so long as she achieves her dreams of becoming a journalist, a mother and a wife.

Following my time with Cleo, I think about the actual pathway she will eventually take. She plans on following the tradition created by her sisters, to go to Gilchrist College and live on campus. If Cleo continues on to university studies, however, she will be the first in her family and one of few in her community to do so. Based on Cleo's motto, I think that one thing is for certain; if at first she doesn't succeed, it won't be through lack of trying. I hope that Cleo *follows her dreams and gets something good happening in her life*.

I wonder if Cleo will become an artist and write *the big stories for the big wigs*. I also wonder if she will marry Tommy and have the two children she so desperately wants,

which she tells me will be *a boy and a girl*. In saying this, if Cleo *grows up* to be *like her mum* and achieves some level of increased *confidence, independence and freedom* and one day *settles down* with a *good job and good pay*, then I have no doubt that she will have fulfilled those goals most important to her.

Lauren Mitchell – Hidden Layers (self titled)

It is the June school holidays and I walk up the driveway of a house in a quiet cul-de-sac to meet Lauren. I notice the basketball ring attached to the side of the garage and the sports shoes on the front step as I knock on the door. Lauren's mother answers, welcomes me in and offers me a seat at the kitchen table. She calls out to her daughter to let her know that I am here. We all sit at the table and talk about the research project and what is involved. Lauren has straight blonde hair and a certain level of seriousness. She is very witty and articulate. I also assume from what I see in the first five minutes that she is a sporty girl. I have an 'all rounder' sitting across the table from me and a very smart one at that.

Lauren asks me about the information form and why I need to keep records of our interviews in a locked drawer for five years. She tells me about a project at school where they had to obtain consent from participants to cover liability and how she thought it wasn't really necessary. We talk about the research more generally and confirm that future interviews will be conducted at her school. I ask Lauren if she will bring artefacts to school with her that tell me more about how she sees herself and her aspirations. Lauren reaches for a folder and takes out a number of award certificates for mathematics, science, and 'track and field'. She looks up at me for the okay to talk about them and I nod yes. In most of the schools around here Lauren would be referred to as a 'high flyer'. This label would be based on her academic ability and her high level of engagement in school, which comes through clearly in our first meeting.

We talk about Lauren's interests, her school and her hometown. I learn about some of Lauren's career aspirations and how these are based on her understanding of what would be the highest paying jobs. Lauren tells me she wrote a list of the highest paying jobs when she was in Grade 7. She is laughing as she relates that she also

wants to be a millionaire. Despite the laughter, I am aware that Lauren is serious and she is aiming for a career that will pay her well.

Over the course of the interviews with Lauren and those with her school principal and mother, I learn a lot about her life and her aspirations.

Lauren is 16 years old and lives with her mother, father and two brothers in an agricultural community based along the coastline of north-west Tasmania. She comes from a working class family who Lauren tells me live from *pay day to pay day*. Her father is a qualified welder and the primary income earner, although her mother occasionally works cleaning houses. Her parents were both the first in their families to complete Year 10. Lauren's older brother is currently following his father's footsteps onto a trade and is undertaking an apprenticeship to become a fitter and turner. Her younger brother wants to also take an apprenticeship pathway like Lauren's father and older brother; however, he is currently excelling at getting into a lot of trouble at high school.

Most of the people living in the larger municipal area are employed in technical and trade positions; however, there are also a large percentage of professionals and labourers. When I meet with the principal of Lauren's high school he describes the wider community as having a *mixture* of different people. He explains that the students come from a range of different backgrounds and relates that these include *professional families who would have high aspirations, blue-collar families who work hard and have a work ethic for their kids, and then that group of kids who come from that sort of a welfare background...*

Despite having good retention rates, the school principal relates that an *extraordinary* number of students from Lauren's high school drop out of Year 11 studies around Easter or soon after. Regarding university studies, he believes that *parents do not push their kids because of the cost*. We talk about the normal pathway being one that leads to a trade qualification rather than a tertiary one. I assume from this conversation that the majority of young people in Lauren's hometown secure an apprenticeship or a traineeship or enter into the workforce sometime during Year 11 rather than

completing college. In Lauren's words, *girls go hair and beauty and boys go engineering, mechanics, fitting and turning and things like that.*

When I talk with Lauren's mother, she tells me that she hopes that her daughter will do *whatever she is happy to do*. She quickly adds to this, *and that will obviously be to go to Riverside College and then to uni*. Lauren's mum tells me that she sees her daughter as being *either a lawyer, a paediatrician or a teacher*. She says that she does not want her daughter to have the life that she had. She explains that she does not want her daughter to be *a checkout chick and then a wife and then a mother*. In discussions with Lauren, it would appear that what her mother expects is also on the list of what she herself wants out of life. Her list, however, is much more extensive.

Lauren has many aspirations, including a variety of career aspirations. She is also very uncertain about what career pathway she wants to take and is deeply contemplating the person she is and wants to be. Lauren's life story, in relation to her aspirations, is presented below in her own words. The following is the story of a girl who knows what she doesn't want:

Everyone would describe me as the girl who knows everything, who is good at everything. The biggest thing for me at the moment is that people don't recognise me for who I am. I think me and mum fight a lot because I'm not like her. She's like all homey. So, by the time she was 25 she was married and had three kids. That's not gonna be me. I'm gonna be out there with a career, chasing 30 boys rather than married to one. That's just who I am. I'm not the settle down and get married type. I don't want to get stuck. I'd rather wait til there is someone that I connect with. I don't want to settle and be in an unhappy relationship. And, if we have kids I wouldn't want them to feel like mum and dad weren't going to be together next week.

I've got heaps of aspirations. I have always wanted to be a lawyer. When I was young I was at a party at my grandparent's place and one of my uncles said to me, 'she can argue, she is going to be a lawyer'. I guess it's always stuck with me as he passed away a couple of weeks later and I've always thought, that's what he wanted, that's what I want. But, I'm interested in radiography at the moment. I've been around them a lot because I've had ankle, shoulder, wrist, everything...and I went on a

medicine/health camp that was run by the uni a few weeks ago and that was really good and one of the main sessions that I liked was the one on radiography.

I'm still interested in being a doctor, just a plain GP or a specialist...just the helping people and seeing something different. And, like, my brother has a cleft palate and so we've spent a lot of time in and around hospitals. I just want to get somewhere in life where I am happy. Astronaut is still pretty high up there. I know I joke about it, but it's still pretty high up there. Just because it's different. Like, I don't want to do something that everybody else has already done.

I've always been set on being a lawyer and that was just it. But now that I'm closer to actually making that decision I'm changing my mind, which is really frustrating because I don't even know what I want. Lately I've kind of been thinking that I want to be a teacher's aide, even though I know that there's no money in it. I really enjoy working with the room 10 kids. Room 10 is our special needs. I really enjoy it, but I don't know how I would go, day in and day out. But I would like to try it. Room 10 with special needs, that's a big thing because I want to give back. So, if I took a gap year, like after Year 11 and Year 12 and be a teacher's aide for that year and then decide what I want to do from there... I know my parents aren't very keen on that, but I am going to take a gap year and do teacher's aide work.

Um, I've always wanted to go to Canada. I don't even know why. I've thought about going to Antarctica. I've thought about doing research on the animals down there. We saw this presentation from this guy and he is like a tour guide and he goes with all the people who are doing the research and I thought that would be really good. And, I want to work on a ski resort. That was one of the things with Canada. I want to work on a ski resort. I just don't want a job where I get out of bed and go, 'oh shit, I've got to go to work today', like, I want to get out and say, 'oh, I get to do this today and I get to do this'. It's kind of the main attraction to the ski resort because it's fun as well as you've got responsibilities. I've just got too many ideas and they are all just jumbled. When it comes to choosing it will be difficult because I've got too many things running around.

I've also toyed with the idea lately of not going to uni. And if I do go to uni, I want to go to a mainland uni. I want to be able to say, 'I went to such and such'. I don't know, just because I see them as a higher standard. Like everyone raves about all these universities, the good ones, your Monash's and your Harvard and all that stuff. Who talks about Hobart University? I know it's not the right way to do it but, I want to say, 'look, look what I've done'. I want to be proud of it. I want to have a good start. Like if you are coming in for a job and you say you're coming from the University of Tasmania or you're coming from the University of such and such from Sydney, it does make a difference.

I think mum and dad expect me to go [to uni], they expect me to go through and do something big. Like, not a P.E teacher or anything, but something big. That's the only word I can think of to describe it. Law is big. Medicine is big. That kind of thing. Like, if I went through and became a Pharmacist they wouldn't mind, but if I became a secretary I know they would. I think they want me to do well in life. Mum is a house cleaner and I know that, well, I don't think she wants me to be stuck doing that. In my family I was always the one who was going to go to uni. I don't know. I think my mum expects me to go to uni just because no one else did. Like, I know they have high expectations of me, sort of thing, and that's another reason why I don't want to go. Because I don't want to do it just because they expect it of me. I want to do it just because it is my passion.

Law is what I always come back to, but I'm thinking that I should probably just settle for something smaller like going down to secretarial stuff or something like that because that's what everyone else does. But, I don't want to be a shit kicker. You know, get the coffees, take out the rubbish, clean the toilets. I don't want to be that person. I don't know, I just want to be happy. A job that I'm happy with, a family that I'm happy with. You see people and they don't look happy to be where they are and I don't want to be one of them people.

People at work influence me. Like, I see them and I don't want to be them. I don't want to have their circumstances. Like my job at the moment it's good because it gets me money but it's not something I want to be doing for the rest of my life. Which is what some of the people I'm working with have been doing. And a lot of the girls

recently have just gone part time so they don't have to go to Grade 11. But I don't know. I don't want to be that sort of person.

Lauren's life story shows how she has various career aspirations, including those that require the completion of college and university but also those that do not. It also highlights aspirations for a gap year and travel. Despite Lauren saying that she does not want to be married with three children before the age of 25, like her mother, in other conversations she communicates aspirations for motherhood and marriage later in life. In many of our conversations and throughout the artefact book, Lauren also expresses her strong desires for a career of passion and a happy and fulfilling life.

Lauren's aspiration to take a gap year and work as a teacher's aide appears to be connected to her wanting to buy career decision-making time. Lauren doesn't talk about this aspiration as something that may change the type of person she is. Instead, Lauren talks about how the experience will buy her time and help her know what she really wants or is capable of doing.

Lauren's story highlights that she doesn't know what career pathway to follow and that she has engaged in a process of eliminating the options she thinks will not bring her fulfilment or happiness. Throughout Lauren's narrative above, for example, there is terminology such as *'I don't want to be that person'*, *'that's not gonna be me'*, *'I don't want to be them'*, *'I don't want to be one of them people'* or *'I don't want to be that sort of person'*. Lauren clearly communicates that she doesn't want to be in the job she is now [a supermarket] forever; she doesn't want to be married young with children; she doesn't want to be in a job where she is unhappy; and she doesn't want to be 'the sort of person' who doesn't go to college. When Lauren communicated this during the interviews, she connected not wanting these things because she didn't see them as bringing her fulfilment, particularly at this point in her life.

What is not so clear to Lauren, though, is what she *does* want to do. This highlights the difficulty in thinking that a choice made now is one that is made forever. Lauren does not suggest that she could be a lawyer and a teacher and someone who works with animals in Antarctica over the course of her life. She seems to feel that she has to choose just one.

Lauren's story is one of conflicting messages and thoughts. One minute Lauren is rejecting the family traditions and expectations as well as community norms and the next she is contemplating doing what *everybody else does*. One minute she talks about wanting to go to university but the next she dismisses the plan. I sense from Lauren that she feels different to everybody else and wants to be different, but she doesn't quite know what her next steps should be. I wonder if Lauren doesn't know whether she should pursue the idea of university or take the easy and more comfortable option of a familiar pathway into secretarial work. I also wonder if much of this confusion and inner conflict stems from her frustration about not knowing what she wants.

Lauren's story shows that many of her aspirations have been shaped by experiences within her family and school world. The idea to become a lawyer came from an uncle at a family gathering. Her aspiration to become a doctor was fuelled by her experiences in and around hospitals with her brother and the realisation that she wanted to help others and see something different each day. A career as a radiologist was shaped by her own experiences through various sporting injuries but also through exposure at school camps. Lauren also connects radiography with *seeing things differently* and understanding something through *someone else's eyes*. A visitor to the school exposed her to the idea of research in Antarctica and her 'back up plans' to become a teacher's aide or secretary are purely because these are the norm. They also buy her time. Lauren's aspiration to work on a ski resort in Canada appears to be an idealistic one, as does her aspiration to become an astronaut. However, Lauren believes these are realistic possibilities.

In fact, Lauren believes that anything is possible. She lives by the motto, *shoot for the moon because even if you miss, you will land amongst the stars* and believes in the saying, *if it's to be it is up to me*. On talking about potential barriers, however, Lauren does admit that she may struggle emotionally and psychologically with leaving home for university. During this conversation she mentions not wanting to leave her little brother. She tells me that she is worried about leaving him on his own at a time when there is some instability in her parent's relationship. I sense that if her current circumstances do not change considerably, they have the potential to play a significant

role in Lauren's future decision-making around university participation and what career pathway she settles on.

I know that Lauren desperately wants and needs maternal recognition for her academic achievements and hard work and that this may influence her educational decision-making. I know this because the Grade 10 awards night had been held the evening before our final interview and Lauren was recognised as a very high achiever. She had taken home several awards for academic and sporting excellence and was extremely pleased about this. Lauren tells me about the awards as soon as I arrive at the school and she explains to me that her mother did not congratulate her or seem proud of what she had achieved. We had many in-depth conversations during the course of the interviews, and in a number of those Lauren was very emotional. On this particular occasion, however, it was the most disappointed and shattered I had seen her.

Lauren wants to be recognised. She wants to be different. And, most of all, she wants others to see her for who she really is. It appears, however, that she doesn't have the answer to that question yet herself. When she finds that answer, she will know what she wants to do with her life but I wonder if this will require a gap year to buy time to engage in 'identity work'. I hope that Lauren continues to *shoot for the moon* and if by any chance she misses, I hope that she *lands amongst the stars*.

Bethany Oliver – Live every day like it's your last

I walk through the front doors of Holland High School and introduce myself and my purpose to the office personnel. The school is part of the wider community of Bayside in the north-west of Tasmania. Bayside is situated within 20 kilometres of a small regional city and is known for its various tourist attractions and commercial fishing. Alongside other towns, it forms a broader municipality known particularly for its dairy and agricultural productions. After I sign in at the school, I am given a key to one of the meeting rooms so that I can prepare for my first meeting with Bethany.

It is 9.30am and the first lesson of the day has only just started. Beth finds me and takes a seat on a couch across from me. She is reserved and quietly spoken and I sense an underlying softness in her. Beth's hair is pulled back loosely in a ponytail and she

has a very casual, easy-going way about her. Her eyes tell me everything that she is thinking. She wants to know what kind of person I am and what I really want. After I introduce myself and explain the research project, I notice Beth's relief. I never thought to ask her what her pre-conceived ideas about the research were. I think, however, that she had probably skipped through the information sheet.

At first, Beth is very comfortable with listening and not so comfortable with talking. I hand her a sheet of questions and invite her to fill it out. This appeals to Beth and while she writes I prompt her to verbally expand on what she is writing. We talk mainly about school subjects, interests, family and the types of things that she is involved in at the moment. Without the questions sheet, I don't think Beth would have opened up very much at all. From the conversations generated by this tool, Beth's story begins to unfold.

Bethany Oliver is 16 years old and in her final year at Holland High School. She lives in Bayside with her mother and father and 13 year old brother who is in Grade 7. Beth has an older brother who is a welder and an older sister who works in a jewellery store. Her father is a fire maintenance officer who recently started his own business and her mother is a disability support worker. During a later interview, I learn that no one in Beth's family has completed secondary college, but her older sister completed some of Year 11. At a later date, I also discover that in Beth's family world, pathways into the workforce following Year 10 studies are highly valued and encouraged. Working part-time prior to completing high school is also valued and encouraged. This may explain why Beth works 25 hours a week in a local food outlet, which she tells me is *alright sometimes but I get real tired from it*.

Beth's favourite subjects are cooking and English and she explains to me that she enjoys *spending time with friends and family, shopping and going to the movies*. Due to work commitments Bethany no longer plays soccer, but it is one of her key interests, alongside cooking, listening to music and watching movies. Her favourite thing to do is babysit her one year old nephew and she says that she spends *too much time on Facebook*.

At the end of our first meeting I give Beth an artefact template book and ask her to think about working on a few of the pages or creating her own artefacts between now and our next meeting. I am unsure how Beth is feeling about the artefact template book, but as we leave the meeting room, I encourage her to work on at least a few pages.

As part of the research, I meet with the school principal to talk about the wider school community as well as what the school does in terms of exposing the students to experiences, resources and programs. I learn from this interview that the principal believes Bayside consists of *three layers*. He talks firstly about a layer that has a *vast majority of people who contribute to the nice town in a very positive sense*. He then goes on to describe how he also sees a second layer of *social and emotional deprivation*, which he refers to as *a deprivation of experience and deprivation of opportunity*. We talk briefly about Peter Saunders² and ‘deprivation indicators’ before the principal describes the third layer of Bayside. According to the principal, this layer includes *that crew of people who are almost withdrawn from that second layer, who are dysfunctional and they tend to live away from Bayside...without any social network associated with them*. From these descriptions I picture Bayside as a very diverse community where two out of the three layers include people who are socially disadvantaged.

From the principal’s point of view there is a blindness to some of the social issues that the community faces around alcohol and drug abuse and gambling. He explains that even though Bayside is a nice place to live, there are still issues that are reasonably well hidden from the community. The principal tells me that the expectations of young people are not high expectations and the school is part of a low aspiration community where there is a tradition to leave school and work.

I learn from the principal that the school highly values pastoral care and places the students at the centre of the learning framework. A diverse range of programs is offered to the students, including vocational education and training programs and

² Professor Peter Saunders is a social policy researcher with the University of New South Wales

there is a major focus on programs that support *applied learning* and *community based learning*. The principal describes what the school offers as a *reasonably traditional diet* but explains that they also *push and blur the boundaries of what it means to be in the classroom*. He is sceptical about how the retention rates for the schools are calculated, as these do not include those students who enter the workforce or follow the vocational education pathway. From our conversations, I assume that the tradition at Holland High is that students transition into Year 11; however, many opt to *leave school and work* at some stage during the college years.

Two weeks after first meeting with Bethany, I return to Holland High for our second interview. Beth is smiling and I notice the artefact template book is tucked securely under her arm. I realise that as a communication tool the book is a comfort to her. It means that she has a visual prop to help her answer questions. Beth surprises me as she opens her book and I see that she has completed every template. She has obviously spent considerable time in doing so. The book contains pages of colourful mind maps, photographic collages, lists and magazine cuttings. I can see that this is time-intensive work and I realise that this is how Beth wants to tell her story. Rather than ask interview questions, I suggest to Beth that she talks to me about what she has in her book and why. In-between Beth showing the book, I ‘sneak in’ questions from the interview guide. Today I see Beth for who she really is, which is how she later describes herself to me – *a friendly and happy person, who is cheerful, kind and confident*. Today and at our next interview, I also learn more about Bethany Oliver’s life and I learn it in the way she wants to tell it. The following story illustrates what Beth’s hopes and dreams for her future are and it is presented in her own words.

I want to be a chef. So that’s what I want to do as a career. I think. All through high school I’ve thought that was something that I wanted to try. We do cooking in Grade 7 and I guess this year I’ve had more hands on experience through TAPP [Traineeship and Apprenticeship Pathway Program] and I really enjoyed it. So I’ve been given the opportunity to try it. You get more of an opportunity to actually think and you get more of an opportunity to see if you actually do like it or don’t like it. If I get the apprenticeship I applied for, I start it and it’s four years. I don’t really want to

do Year 11 and 12. I'm a bit over school. I would rather be on an apprenticeship than just be at school.

I'm allowed to do another work placement. I've organised mine to be up at the hospital in the kitchen. I was going to do child care because a few of my friends did child care with TAPP and I just like kids and I just want to see what I would actually like. But then I thought, 'no, I might as well just keep doing hospitality'. Like get another look at a different kitchen and stuff.

I want to own my own business. I want to have a restaurant one day. Hopefully do something like that. Have my own kind of thing. I always used to watch Gordon Ramsay and how he goes to all the kitchens and so I think I have probably been influenced by what I've seen on TV and stuff like that. If I tried being a chef and I don't like it, then working in a nursing home or in disability or something else like that. I just sort of thought I want to give back to the community kind of thing. Mum and some of mum's friends and my sister's friends work in a nursing home and mum works with disability people and I just thought that would be a cool thing. That's something that mum does and I've got people around me that have done it.

I do see myself being a chef because that's what I really want to do. So, I guess if I just put my mind to it and study and stuff then you can do it. That's probably the most realistic. It's just what I really want to do. And it is possible. Like, if you put your mind to it. Mum and dad know that I want to be a chef so they may not be expecting me to do it, but think I will pursue it as a career. Dad wants me to be a chef so that I can cook all his food but he's just joking. I don't know.

I just like cooking and I thought it would be a good job because you can travel. Well, it's pretty good, the hospitality industry is pretty open and worldwide. I want to do some travelling. I thought it would be really good to just see the rest of the world. Just see all the different places and you just think it would be cool to get away. More specific I want to go to Africa. I just want to see how different we are to them. Just from seeing stuff on the TV and it would be interesting to get another look on how they live and their take on life. I want to see how other people do things. How different it is. I've seen stuff on TV about how a lot of the third world countries are

and I thought how it would be pretty cool to go to an orphanage over there and just see that kind of thing. I want to do something that's not just all about me. And, I want to learn another language. So that probably ties into that one [points to travel] because if I want to go anywhere I will probably have to learn another language. I always wanted to learn something else.

What might stop me? Well, just getting offered an apprenticeship, I guess. I don't know how much the exams count but if you didn't do good in your exams it might affect it a bit. Ah, exams, I'm a bit worried about them. That I won't get good marks. That's probably about all. And probably just money but I guess nothing is really impossible if you really try and want it.

I want to get a new job. I've been at Food Fest for two years in November. They offered me assistant manager there next year but I didn't really want to do that. I don't really want to stay there. I think I just want something different. A change. I don't think it's that good just staying in the same thing. I am attempting to save money. I have two bank accounts and one I just put money in and I don't open it. After Grade 10 I want to get my Ps. I'm on my Ls at the moment. I'm saving up to buy a car and I want to save for a holiday as well and meet new people. I just want to save and go somewhere. Like my sister, she is going to New Zealand at Christmas and we just think that next year we can go on a holiday together.

After Grade 12, if I do Grade 12, hopefully I'll know what I want to do career wise and with my future. And, by the time I am 30 I want to have a family and be married and maybe have done some travelling. It was probably when looking after Toby [nephew] that I decided that I really wanted to have kids. So, to start my own family. So, he influenced that a bit. And seeing how happy mum and dad are together, I guess. It's good role models mum and dad be still together. It's a good thing.

A good life? Probably just being happy and just having friends and family around and just doing a rewarding career or something that you really want to do. I guess money, well, not being rich or anything, but that kind of thing. I believe that you should live every day like it is your last and don't take things for granted. Family and friends are probably one of the most important things in life And, happiness, that's a pretty big

thing. And relationships with people, having good relationships. And education, it's always good to be good in school. A job and school, same kind of thing. Um, helping people in need. So, just not always thinking about yourself. That's the same kind of thing. Happiness is probably the big one. I guess things are more rewarding if you're happy with your job or where you are in life because it's going to be easier to go forward.

Beth's story above shows that she has aspirations for careers and other life pursuits. If her plans to become a chef do not unfold for her, she has the backup plan of working in a nursing home or with people with a disability. Although dismissed for the time being, Beth has also considered child care as an option. Beth is exposed to the idea of becoming a chef through her school world and the idea of opening her own restaurant through the media. Her backup plans, however, appear to be shaped by her family world and her mother's current occupations - which are also occupations held by other females around her, including her sister's friends and her mother's friends. The school world may have shaped Beth's chef aspirations and it appears this is being reinforced in her family world also. What is interesting in the above story is that Beth refers to school and work *as the same kind of thing*.

In between the second and third interviews with Beth, I meet with her mother. From our conversations I learn that she hopes her daughter becomes a chef. When I ask her why, she responds with the following:

I know that is what she really wants to do. Well, I think that is what she wants to do. I think she really wants to be a chef because she knows that she will be able to do that. Because she is really good at cooking. But deep down I think she would really like to work with abused children or something along those lines. She is probably thinking that that is not a real reality at the moment to do. She would have to be going to uni. Whereas with cooking she knows that she will be able to get a job and do something with that right now. But in the future I could see her doing something along the lines of psychology or something like that. That would be cool.

Beth's mother tells me that she doesn't see her daughter as being a chef *forever* and expects her to engage with a career not dissimilar to her own, as a support worker, or

work with abused children. We talk about working with abused children and Beth's mother mentions that not only does she hope that Beth can do that one day, but that she herself would like to work in that area. The more we talk, the more I wonder if she sees both herself and her daughter in traditional female caring roles more so than anything else. Despite this, however, it appears that she is very supportive of Beth obtaining an apprenticeship as a chef at this point in time. I ask her if she hopes Beth will do Years 11 and 12 and she responds with the following:

I don't know. It's hard to say. You don't want them to miss out on a job if they are offered a job. Because if she does Years 11 and 12 and still wants to be a chef at the end of it, I don't know that Year 11 and 12 would have been that much beneficial. Because she could have already had two years of an apprenticeship done. And if you do an apprenticeship you are still going to school, partly anyway. Because her brother he is a sheet metal worker and he has had to do four years of Tafe to do that.

In conjunction with exposure to the idea in the school world, parental expectations and support also run through as a factor that influences Beth's career aspirations. For example, Beth's chef aspiration is encouraged and leaving school to enter into the workforce is valued. The personal stories from Beth's mother also show the reinforcement of the caring careers and traditionally female career pathways, that Beth herself is entertaining, if her chef plans do not come to fruition.

When talking with Beth's mother about why she thought Beth was interested in being a chef, she went on to say, *well, you do know that she is diabetic, don't you?* To which I answered, "No, perhaps Beth didn't see that as an influence on her aspirations". She then continued on to say that since finding out she was diabetic, Beth had spent a lot of time learning about what she is allowed to eat and preparing her own meals. Beth's mother thought that this experience of preparing and cooking meals had probably been part of the reasoning behind her daughter wanting to be a chef. If this is the case, exposure and experience caused by circumstances or 'a critical moment' has played a part in shaping Beth's hopes to become a chef.

I learn from Beth's mother that the way they found out about Beth's diabetes was when her daughter fell into a diabetic coma. She explains to me how Beth almost

didn't live through this. I realise that this particular experience may be why Beth tells me during the third interview that she believes you should *live every day like it's your last and don't take things for granted*. I wonder how much this worldview of hers has shaped all of her aspirations and how much it will influence her eventual pathway decision-making.

As for Beth's travel aspirations, these stem from her sister's recent travel to New Zealand and, despite not appearing in her story above, they also stem from her own experiences as a younger girl travelling to Hobart and also to Melbourne. These experiences have shaped her desire to see more of the world. There is also a connection between travel and career choice in Beth's story, which suggests she has thought about her future occupation in terms of it being a travel enabler.

From the various conversations with Beth, I learn that she is driven largely by her underlying affective aspirations for health and happiness. I don't know for certain what Beth's pathway will be, but her desires to become a chef and to secure a rewarding career are first and foremost in her mind at this point in time. She talks often about wanting to be there for her family and her friends and it is also clear that she feels strongly about making some kind of contribution by *giving back to the community* as a disability worker or by helping in African orphanages. I hope that Beth continues to hold strong her aspirations to *live everyday like it is her last and never take things for granted*. Based on the interviews and my time with Beth, it is clear that the aspirations that mean the most to Beth include finding a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction in her job, being self-sufficient, travelling and maintaining close relationships with her family and friends. Beth appears to know who she is and who she wants to become. In some ways, I think this has helped her to paint a clearer picture of herself into the future.

Grace Edna – The Tom Quilty Queen

I'm sitting in the front meeting room of a school that is in the heart of a small rural farming community situated approximately 20 kilometres inland from a regional centre waiting for Grace. Many people in the community are employed in technical

and trade positions or as managers or labourers. The town is central to a range of tourist attractions and well known for its art, craft and local produce.

Grace taps on the door as she walks in smiling. She introduces herself before she sits down next to me at the table. Grace has long blonde hair which is pulled back into a loose ponytail. Her dark brown eyebrows, however, suggest that blonde is not her natural hair colour. She is wearing her full school uniform with a thick cream coloured woollen scarf wrapped around her neck. Grace has a wide smile and soft, friendly eyes. Grace tells me she umpired 12 games of basketball over the weekend and I soon learn that she is also heavily involved in endurance horse riding, polocross and cattle shows.

We discuss what is involved in participating in the research and I explain to Grace how the stories that she shares with me will form part of my thesis. Grace is quick to ask me what I plan on doing if I complete my PhD. This is not the only time that I feel like the researcher being researched over the course of the interviews with Grace. I find that Grace listens very carefully and she takes time to think before she responds to a question or asks me a question. I learn today and on later occasions that Grace thinks things through and is aware of this:

I don't know when to stop thinking sometimes...I get very caught up in things. Because I think of all the things, like, what if I do that and this happens and what will happen if I do this? And that sort of thing. It gets very tiring.

Grace describes herself as *a very determined sort of person who is optimistic, enthusiastic and trusting*. She tells me that her friends would probably describe her as *a bit crazy* and her close family would say that she is *strong willed*. I find it interesting that she doesn't describe herself as 'full of life' because this is how I see her.

On our first day of meeting I learn that Grace is 15 years old and lives with both her parents and her three sisters on a 50 acre farm property on the edge of town. She tells me that her mother is a home economics teacher at Chapman District High, which she herself attends, and her father also works at the school as a teacher's aide. Grace explains, however, that her father worked as a mechanic for most of his life. Grace

tells me that she has an older sister in Year 11 at college and two younger sisters, one in Grade 7 and the other in Grade 5. We talk about her interests for a while and her involvement in school. Grace relates that she is on the student council and that she is also a vice house captain. During our first interview I also learn that Grace works on weekends at a local store and is an enthusiastic and competitive endurance rider who also competes in cattle shows. Grace explains to me that she loves riding her horses in the nearby mountains and entering cattle competitions, and these are her passions.

At the end of our first meeting I show Grace the blank artefact template book. We talk about how she may want to draw some mind maps or create something else in the book before the next interview. Grace says nothing about her aspirations as I show her through the template book, except for a comment about how daunting it is to think about the future. I know that she is thinking and wondering about what she might write and this is the reason why she is suddenly very quiet. We discuss a date and time for our next meeting and I give Grace the blank template book to take with her.

The next time that I see Grace is for our second interview. She walks into the meeting room with a bubbly greeting and her artefact book in hand. Grace opens her book almost straight away and says to me, *I didn't really do the first page because I really wanted to do this one*, and flips past the first page in the book to the second page which is titled "What I'm doing now". The first page was titled "My aspirations". I immediately realise that Grace is comfortable living in the here-and-now and would prefer to talk about that. She shows me a collage that she has created in the book and talks about the meanings behind all of the photographs. I learn a lot from this conversation, some of which I soon connect with her future goals.

Grace talks me through every photograph. The first one has been taken in a paddock. It is a picture of Grace's legs from the middle of her thighs down and shows her sporting cowgirl boots that almost reach up to her knees. A horse and a foal have been captured in the distance and in the photograph it looks like they are standing between Grace's legs. Her best friend has taken the picture who, Grace explains, *is a great photographer who is always trying to tee me up to be a model*. The second photograph she talks me through shows her at a cattle show on the mainland decked out in a cowgirl hat, shirt, pants and boots, with Grace in a sitting position behind a

cow that is on the ground in hay. She tells me that the cattle handling competition was *major* and *just so big* and that she *loved the experience*. The next photograph is of her riding a horse in a recent 40 kilometre endurance competition. There are also some other photographs of Grace with horses and cattle on this page.

I think the message that Grace was trying to pass on to me, whether knowingly or not, was that this is what she sees herself as being now and maybe in the future, which is a competitive horse rider and a cattle handler. The remaining photographs are of holiday snaps with her sisters, pictures of her friends at school and a photo of her father standing proudly in front of a rental property that he renovated. Grace thinks that her father is *pretty incredible* and *funny*. I have a feeling that even though Grace is talking about her life now, she wants these things to continue to be a big part of her life over time, but she doesn't actually state this.

Following our conversation about what is happening in her life now, Grace turns the page in her book to "After Grade 10" and explains, *When I first started doing it [the blank template] I was thinking like immediate stuff. I wasn't thinking way off into the future*. This point in time marks the beginning of many in-depth conversations with Grace about her aspirations and the related experiences using the collages and mind maps that Grace created as props. The following is Grace's life story regarding her aspirations, which has been carefully pieced together using her own words.

I will obviously go to Riverside College next year and then possibly uni after that. I'm not sure. Or an apprenticeship... Well, my sister went to Riverside. And she liked it, she enjoyed going to Riverside. And well, it's kind of the only real option... I could go to Lincoln College which is a private school but I'm not a very religious person so I probably wouldn't want to do that sort of thing. I think also because most of my good friends here will also go to Riverside. I think that my family expects me to go to Riverside [College]. Actually they would be like, 'what?' if I said I wasn't going to Riverside. Yeah, that is a big expectation. I think mum would expect me to not only go to Riverside College but to go really well at that and really try with my grades and find somewhere to go after that. Well, I would like to do that too. I want to find somewhere that I can go to.

I thought that the career I choose probably will need like a uni qualification. So I could probably go up to Langly and do like the agricultural thing, like a degree up there. Or I could go to Belltown or I could go to Portsville because there's a few more options there. I think it will depend on what I decide I want to do. At one point I thought I would do something to do with health, so physical wellbeing as well as emotional. I'm really interested in that sort of thing and it is important to me. I have an awesome teacher for PE which is probably why I really like these fitness things. And one of my mum's friends, who I think is a social worker, she has done some really awesome things in the community like helping out people with drug problems and that sort of thing and so I am really interested in that sort of thing.

But, then I have my horses and that is a really strong thing for me at the moment. I mean I would love to do that as a career but in the back of my mind I am thinking that it is not a very big possibility. Because it's not very easy. In fact it is very difficult to make a career out of that. Like a successful, money-making career. When I think of apprenticeships I always think of building or a mechanic or that sort of thing, but if I were to get an apprenticeship with a successful trainer I just think, 'oh, if I could just get in there'. And even an apprenticeship after I have done something in the health industry...get qualified and then get an apprenticeship.

Because I have no idea what I want to do, I wrote down that after Grade 10 I want to have a career that I love and that I am passionate about. And also, I want to know the steps that I have to take to get there, the things that I have to organise and work hard at. In Grade 5, I just had an awesome teacher and I just loved her and I am now lucky enough to have her this year. And I don't know what it was, but I learnt you can be so happy in your job that it's not work. My mum is so passionate about cooking and making the country healthier. She has these massive big goals as well, like she is really passionate about it. And for some reason at that stage in time, I thought, 'right, I am going to do this, I am going to find something that isn't work that I get paid for'. And that was Grade 5. Yeah. Well, I have had so many good teachers.

And I want to work, well Outdoor Ned's where I work at the moment, I mean I love that job. And after Grade 10 I probably will work there until Grade 12 and then after

that I have to go to Belltown or Portsville or even the mainland so I have to kind of think about work.

I want to always 'laugh lots' because I was getting a bit serious. I put a lot of pressure on myself because I really want to get to wherever I am going. I want to 'experience' [pauses] I really want to travel. I love seeing and meeting people. I want 'to learn', so seeing more and travelling and I just want to see lots and do lots. I just want to learn and get to see things that will make me not so much a better person but more content and be able to give more to everything I do, like effort. I want to 'taste', like I meant that from their perspective. To see how other people live.

And I wrote down 'horses' too. Because in the endurance kind of industry, there is money chucked around everywhere. My mum, my mum said to me something like, 'horse people are crazy' because mum finds it so funny how much money people will spend...So, riding for people and even doing some training of their horses and that kind of thing. And I really want to get my licence and I can get my Ls in September so that will be really good.

And I want to 'inspire'. I wrote that down there because I want to inspire people but I want to be inspired. I think I just want it to work both ways, I just love meeting people. I want to 'hold on'. So even though I am going to be at a different school and have different friends, I still want to hold on and remember and, like, keep in touch. And remember all the lessons I've learnt. I know it's easy once you get out there and you're 18 because you have more freedom and that sort of thing.

And I want to 'let go', because I want to let go all my worries. Not so much fear because I don't fear the future, I'm very excited for it but I don't want to have that as a thing in my way. And then the people that I love. I'm not very good at that, like when people need to move on. You need to still remember them and grieve if they pass away, but 'let go' kind of thing.

And polocrosse. I would really like to get up to B Grade with my polocrosse. That is still quite important to me. I just love that kind of hobby. And then I had goals up there as something that I want [referring to a mind map]. Because I am a real goal

setter. It just makes it easier for me if I've got this one thing that I'm aiming for, I really like that.

And then I had 'endurance' and I had 'qualify'. So if I can do 240 kilometres and 380 kilometres then I'm a qualified endurance rider. And then, if I can do 'a hundred miler', a 160 kilometres, then I can go into something called the Tom Quilty³. That's massive. It's only down here in Tassie every seven years because it goes around all of Australia. It's just a big, big ride. I wouldn't really mind if it takes a while to get there. It won't be like just going out and riding a hundred miles. It is going to take a lot.

I guess I want to travel to be able to see all my family but I also just want to see what's out there. I know that sounds corny and stuff but I do really want to go to places that will make me think about what I want to do. Like last year we did really big research on Africa and just all of those sorts of countries in there and how they live and what they do and I was really interested about that... In the future [laughs] when I am successful [laughs] hopefully I will have money from work to travel and that will work smoothly and then hopefully either my career will be able to be linked to travel or making money.

I want to be able to have a balance. Work my arse off and get where I want to go and then I want to also be able to have fun and spend time with my friends. So I want to be able to balance that. I think if I was living the good life I would be able to go out and work hard at whatever my job is or my career but I also want to be able to stop and take a bit of time. I know how easy it is to get so caught up in it all and then at the end you are just exhausted because you haven't stopped and given yourself that time to think.

And I want to have a nice big house and a bit of land and horses and a good car, probably a ute actually, not like a bombie ute, just a nice one. I don't know if I want to live near the beach or just have that as a bit of a ritual in the summer. I want to

³ Tom Quilty was an Australian station owner known for his skill and passion for endurance horse riding. The Tom Quilty Gold Cup, a highly regarded endurance horse riding competition in Australia, was named in his honour.

keep that because I just love that time. And yeah, in saying that, I want a bit of land. I want to be near a city or a town. I don't want to be out in the middle of nowhere. I don't really like that. Um, and yeah, I always kind of imagine just being busy. I don't want and I don't ever think I could ever be bored.

My mum and dad are very big influences. Well, in our family we are all so different and we all have different goals and we kind of drive each other. You never just sit at home and twiddle your thumbs kind of thing. They are very encouraging. And then it's funny because the horses, well, my mum had horses when she was little but it's probably my neighbours Mark and Sally who have influenced me with that...from the very start, they gave me a polocrosse racquet and put me on a horse and took me to everything and they influenced me in that way. They are kind of like my second mum and dad. They are really close family friends. Mark is expecting me to keep going with my endurance because I am riding his horse [laughs] so he's already got it all teed up. He is quite funny. He is looking after me a lot in all of that, giving me all the tips and I wouldn't be doing it without him. And, Sally, because she rides as well as a hobby, she expects me to keep doing it as well. I think that because they're so passionate about it and Mark did the Tom Quilty and did polocrosse and endurance.

And then dad, after Grade 10, I think he expects me to keep on doing the things that I really like. I think he wants me to do all these things here that I am really passionate about. If I stopped doing them I think he would be really worried. I think he expects me to keep on going with them. He's funny, especially with the endurance. He has really started to get right behind me with that and having the Tom Quilty as a goal. With the polocrosse, mum and dad didn't really know anything about it, so they couldn't really go, you know, 'good job'. But with the endurance, well, he still doesn't know much about it but he likes to think he does though [laughs]. He tells me little tips and stuff and I think, 'oh dear dad' but, I think he expects me to keep on doing that.

My group of friends, we are all very close, we have known each other for a very long time. So my close group of friends, they expect me to find something that I am really passionate about and kind of get crazy with it...None of us really know what we want to do. So it's not like such and such is going to be a nurse, such and such is going to

be a teacher, you know. It's just not like that. I think that is because there is just so much out there. So many possibilities of things that we could do. So yeah, I think they expect me to go to Riverside and, just like them, I guess, find something hopefully there.

I think most of us [from this school] go to Riverside College after Year 10. Then I guess it depends. Some of us stick it out at Riverside and then go to uni but I think the majority would finish Riverside and then get a job. Or not even do Riverside, just go straight into work.

I don't think that the next step, like going on to Riverside College, is seen as an important thing. I know in my family it is very important to get that Year 12 education but I think it is probably here [in the wider community] more, 'oh well, you've done your Year 10, so now do you want to work?' That kind of thing. But that's not necessarily a bad thing. Like, I know lots of girls and boys who are, you know, in the workforce and who like it.

It [living here] has made me, not want to 'get out', but it has made me really want to go somewhere. Because I work in town and I see local customers, I think for me to see all of that it makes me more eager to push - and do Riverside and go to uni and that sort of thing and really find something that I love.

Grace's story shows that she has various aspirations in life. Many of these are affective aspirations that are underlying emotional motivators for Grace. Her desires to 'hold on', 'experience', 'laugh lots', 'learn', 'let go' and 'inspire' are some examples of these. Many of Grace's affective aspirations are attached to those things that she is doing now and what she is passionate about at this moment in time. Grace at one point even says, *instead of me trying to guess and shoot out ideas about what I might be doing in 10 years time, I just want to keep doing what is important to me now.* I believe this is why our conversations about her aspirations nearly always come back to the things that she is doing now. Grace is living in the moment. She is happy and everything that she does is fulfilling, satisfying, fun and rewarding. So, it makes perfect sense that Grace aspires for a world that is not that dissimilar to the one that she is currently in. During other conversations Grace talks about wanting to *just live*

and this aspiration appears to be one that is connected to those she has for happiness and fulfilment.

From our conversations, I learn that Grace has many career aspirations but she is clearly uncertain about what pathway she wants to take. When we talk about the college to university pathway Grace mentions being interested in agriculture or health. At a later time, however, and not included in the above story, she tells me that she wants to do work experience with a horse chiropractor from on the mainland because she is thinking about that as a career possibility. She also mentions being interested in social work as a career and *helping out people with drug problems*. Grace therefore has at least four career aspirations that require a tertiary level qualification. Other goals, however, include an apprenticeship as a horse trainer following college completion, or simply taking a year off to ride horses, work and compete in cattle shows.

During the course of the interviews with Grace I also meet with her mother. The first question that I ask is, “What are your hopes for Grace’s future? What would you like her to do with her life?” And she replies with the following:

It’s a tricky one. Grace really does have a gift with animals. Like, she really does have a strong connection with animals and I think I’d love her to do work with animals. I mean it probably sounds cliché but as long as they’re happy. It’s the same with all our girls. I don’t measure success by monetary terms. I measure success by self-satisfaction and probably contribution. I like to think that my kids will all make a difference. That’s always been important to me, to make a difference. But because Gracie does have this real ability to relate and to calm animals and the horses and things I think it would be lovely if she got into that field. The thing she’s pretty interested in is the horse chiropractic stuff and it’s very specialised and I’m not sure that there’ll be enough work or even enough training opportunity for that. I’d like to see her [pauses], she’s sort of talked about having a horse stud. That’s a possibility I guess as well...as long as she’s working with animals and outdoors I think she’ll be pretty satisfied.

Later in the interview with Grace's mother, she mentions again that she thinks it is important to aspire to '*something*' and says that she believes you should aspire to *something that is either bettering yourself or bettering things for others*. I sense from our conversations that making a contribution as well as growth or self-development are strong family values. The value on self-development or growth comes up again later when Grace's mum mentions that she hopes her daughter takes a gap year before going to university. She had done this herself and explains at the end of the sentence, *I think you grow up a lot when you have a year off...*

The maternal tradition of and value placed on the gap year has perhaps created this expectation in Grace's family world. When I ask Grace's mother what she would like to see Grace do during her gap year she answers with the following:

Works...I mean she's worked for a couple of years already...I mean if she moved away and lived with friends and flatbed and just did bar work or did any sort of job really. Her dad and I'll support them, we'll always support them financially if they need support to get through uni but, yeah, probably just have a nice year after a hard year of study, which Grade 12 is...just have a bit of a lighter year, get a few dollars in the bank...

The above thoughts from Grace's mother suggest that she connects the gap year with experiencing something different and earning some money by *moving away, doing some bar work, flatting with friends and getting a few dollars in the bank*. The gap year as a time for growth may therefore be seen as a way of becoming more independent and self-reliant, suggesting these are valued in the family world also.

Further education is also valued in Grace's family world, which may be seen in her mother's comments about support for university above. She also says at another time that she believes strongly in *lifelong learning* more generally and finishes the sentence with, *I just think when you stop learning you may as well be dead, like, there's always, always little things that you can find out about yourself and about the world...*

At one point during the interview, I ask Grace's mother if she believes she has had any influence on her daughter's aspirations and she responds with the following:

Probably...I always say, well, not always, but I often say to the kids, 'you just want to pack it in, put as much into your life as you can sort of thing'...People often say, 'Grace's really busy' and I say, 'yeah, she is really busy'. But I don't see a problem with that. I just think being busy's what you be and when you die you'll be spent...

I learn from the above conversations with Grace's mum, as well as others, that there is a family value and tradition of *being busy* and that it is also an expectation. In her life right now, Grace certainly *packs it in*. Prior to the interview with her mother, Grace and I talk about her being busy and rather than use the terminology '*packing it in*' she tells me she believes you should '*burn the candle at both ends because it's a brighter light*' and '*go all out*'. She also warns, however, *that you really do need time to take a break from it*. I wonder if this is why Grace aspires for balance in her life, which is something that she emphasises in conversations.

During the third interview, I ask Grace what does she realistically think she can do and what are the possibilities. Grace relates that she believes there are *many possibilities* and repeats to me all of the aspirations that she has previously communicated. She concludes the response to the question, however, with:

I kind of hate that in a way because I've got all these decisions to make about it all and that's when it will get hard...I think I'm going to have to pick one way instead of trying to do them all. I think I will just run myself out if I try to do everything.

In other conversations I learn that not only does Grace believe the possibilities for her are endless but she also believes that there are no barriers in her way to achieving any of her goals. Grace tells me that she believes *everything happens for a reason and when you are in that really tricky spot, there is hope...another door will open*. I think this is partly why Grace sees endless possibilities and no social, economic or cultural constraints. I learn that Grace believes, *your own actions are kind of what you get back...if you are going to give and live fully then things will make their way back to you... I believe, what's my mum always say all the time? What you put out to the universe will come back...*

Grace currently sees herself as both *giving* and *living life fully* and this may be what she hopes will someday *come back*. Grace sees nothing in her way and believes that

any and all aspirations are achievable. In saying this, however, she does mention not being able to balance them all and having to *pick one way*.

When I think about Grace's future pathways, I wonder if she will fulfil those aspirations that are close to her mother's heart around *bettering yourself or bettering things for others*. I find it difficult to picture Grace not *being busy* and I cannot imagine her in a space that takes her away from her horses or cattle. Based on what she shared in the interviews, it does not appear to be beyond Grace's reach to fulfil her ultimate dream and compete in the Tom Quilty. Grace may have to '*pick one way*' initially in terms of her pathway into adulthood; however, the way will be the one she believes will lead her to fulfilling those goals most important to her – happiness, success, fulfilment, contribution and balance.

LJ Cooper – I'm a country girl

It's nearing the end of the June school holidays and I pick up the telephone and dial LJ's number. Just before I am diverted to message bank, a very confident and friendly voice answers. I introduce myself and we talk briefly about the study. LJ confirms her interest in participating and we arrange to meet at Holland High School the following week. I realise during our telephone conversation that LJ has a 'no nonsense' type of approach. The first day we meet, I see LJ's 'let's get straight down to business' style. She walks into the meeting room and almost immediately asks me how many times we will meet and what she is expected to do. This approach is, however, largely softened by her sense of humour.

LJ is tall and her brown shoulder length hair has tight curls with blonde highlights. She is wearing a navy school counsellor jacket. When she sits her posture is very correct. Initially, I just think she knows how to sit properly. As we talk more, however, I learn that she is a horse rider and associate her posture with that. LJ describes herself as *very opinionated, argumentative, upfront, individual, stubborn and fiery*. During our time together, I see where she is coming from with *upfront*, but I also see a confident, fun and happy side to LJ that she doesn't include in her self assessment of her character.

LJ Cooper is 15 years old and lives on a 120 acre farm approximately 10 kilometres outside of the town of Bayside. She lives with both of her parents and her two sisters. LJ identifies with being *a country girl* and refers to herself using this description on more than one occasion during our time together. Despite leaving school at the end of Grade nine and having no formal qualifications, her father owns and manages the farm that they live on and has his own agricultural business. LJ's mother completed high school and has worked in a bank since this time. Her eldest sister completed college and is midway through her second gap year. LJ's other sister is studying towards a diploma in child care. LJ's family appear to be very well off in terms of their assets and I assume they are in the middle to high income bracket.

At our first meeting, LJ relates that she is happy living on the farm and that she loves animals, especially horses. She explains that when she stays with friends in town they *street walk*⁴ and she tells me that she would much prefer to *go home and ride a horse*. When not on a horse, LJ says that she rides motorbikes around the farm and plays hide and seek in the maize with those whom she calls her *horse riding slash farmie friends*. She tells me that she is passionate about horses and show jumping, as well as state league netball. LJ explains that she has *no social life* because of these passions. She is in her final year at Holland High school and has many hopes for her future. The following story is LJ's life story regarding her aspirations. Her own words from the interviews are woven together to tell her story.

I want to be a vet. I love animals. I think because I've lived on a farm and have just loved them since forever. You know how when you're little you have all these things and you kind of grow out of it? Well, I haven't really grown out of my 'I want to be a vet' stage. I suppose living on a farm as well with animals surrounding me helps as well. I've always wanted to get involved when we've had vets up treating animals. I think that's where it came from and it's just kind of stuck. My parents have always been supportive of the idea, but I don't think they influenced me to start with. It's just my idea and it just came and that's pretty much it.

⁴ 'street walk' is a colloquial term that means to walk around the main streets of a town

What do I like about the idea of becoming a vet? Helping animals because they can't help themselves...getting involved and seeing the difference between an unhealthy animal and then making it healthy. Just seeing that makes it all worth it really. I think I will definitely work with the bigger animals rather than the smaller animals... I think for me as an outdoor person, it would be good to be outside on the farms with big animals...

And I would like to have the farm...maybe even own it someday. Huge goal. Huge goal. But that would be good. That would be amazing. It's a bit disappointing because there are no boys to take it on now, which has always been the tradition. The farm's been in our family for years and years and years and it would just be good to carry it on and I just enjoy it so much. I mean, I would like to do it but if I'm going to be a vet I'm going to be away for six years...because if you want to be a vet, you have to go to the mainland. There are no courses in Tasmania for veterinarian science.

If I want to be a vet nurse, yeah I can do it in Tassie, but I don't want to be a vet nurse, I want to be the real deal. I want to go away as far away as I can so I'd probably go to Perth 'cause I think they have a course there...or the Gold Coast. Somewhere different...I think Perth because I haven't been there before and it would be a good experience and my sister went there and said it was a really nice city. And the Gold Coast because I've been there a million times and I just love going there and it will be fun...

And I would really like, this is huge. I would really like to go to one of the netball teams on the mainland. Like the Vixens. I play state league netball, obviously in Tassie...and I think I am beginning to like netball now a lot more than I used to and I just think that I would really like to go further and stuff with that. And I could, I could go for the state team... but I just don't have enough time with all the horses and stuff like that. I think as I get older I will be able to manage my time a lot better. Because I won't have school and stuff. Yeah, not sure on that one.

And, like I said, just lots of travelling...mostly around Australia. Travelling came from my sister because she went away with two friends and went around the mainland and it just sounded amazing. And next year my aunty may be going to Vietnam and

Cambodia and she has offered to take me along and that would be amazing but I'm just not sure if that will end up happening.

What do I see myself actually doing? Well I have the next two years of schooling and I know I will do them [Years 11 and 12]. Because I just am going to do them. I reckon I will get a bit slack, maybe and just have a gap year or something. And I haven't got a job yet so I think I will do that. Again, I would like to think that I will definitely be going to the mainland to do my vet thing but if not I've always got my other four plan b's... I wouldn't mind becoming a physiotherapist. Again that's huge marks [sucks in air] and if I had those marks I would probably go for vet anyway. Um yeah, I think physiotherapist because my sister has been talking about it. She wants to be that now. She said she wouldn't mind being a physiotherapist and I wouldn't mind the whole sports physiotherapy and stuff.

And maybe if that all fails, um I wouldn't mind going to the navy. But that was just a fantasy from the old Sea Patrol [laughs – as this is an Australian television show]. But I think I wouldn't mind doing the armed forces and I think if I had to choose that would be the one I would do. Dad has always been, like, always said that if you don't know what you want to do, just go and join the armed forces for a few years and get a feel for it and then like I heard how you can go there for your gap year and they pay you and stuff and just the fact that, well, it's always an option. It could be an option for anyone. But hopefully I don't have to be in the navy, I can be a physiotherapist or a vet [laughs].

If there was one person I would like my career to be like, well not my career, my future to be like, it would be dad, because like I said, he can do a bit of everything. He's learnt from a young age all these different things and I think that is something that I would like to do. So, learn from every experience and gain some knowledge around everything. Yeah, I think that he would be the most influential person. Don't tell him that either [laughs]. I don't want him to get a big head [laughs]. Mum's been working in a bank for 40 years, no, she's not that old, 30 years. And I just can't see myself being inside working for 30 years. I think I need something with a bit of variety in it...

As the above story shows, LJ talks largely about her aspiration to be a veterinarian. She also talks about further education. During our interviews LJ tells me that her reasons for wanting to go to college and university were purely because she needed the qualifications to achieve her career ambitions. At one point during these discussions about further education she says, *I know... I'm going to spend half my life at school* and I become aware of this being something that is daunting to her even though it is what she really wants.

LJ has backup plans that include going into physiotherapy or joining the navy, but she also tells me during another conversation, *I can even just work for a few years and then decide what I am going to do from there*. LJ strongly believes that her career aspiration to become a vet has not been influenced by others but it has been supported by others. For example she explains to me during the second interview:

I have my riding instructor and she is always really really supportive. She's like my second mum, and she really wants me to go out into the world and do big things. When I call her, I am like, 'hey, it's your adopted daughter here'. She taught my mum as well when she was littler so it's more like a friendship thing. And I go down there every school holidays and spend about two weeks with her and you don't get homesick because it's like my home... she thinks it would be great if I were a vet because she would have her own personal vet [laughs].

LJ also says that her parents are supportive of her wanting to become a vet and often remind her of the need to work hard at school. She relates that an almost daily message from her parents, especially her father, is *'you better knuckle down if you want to get into your uni'*. In reference to her parents supporting her to go to university LJ also tells me, *I think they want me to succeed*. Success in this sense is therefore something that is connected in some way to either a tertiary education or achieving the career aspiration that you most desire. It is difficult to distinguish between the two from this particular conversation with LJ, but at two different times, she mentions to me, *you have to get that piece of paper* - which she tells me are her father's words of advice. I therefore assume it is the educational qualification itself that is valued and seen as bringing success. I later learn, however, when I meet her

mother, that working hard and pursuing what you want to do is also valued in the family world.

The above story also shows LJ's gap year aspiration and travel aspiration as well as a desire to find a job in Year 11. LJ's aspiration to play netball for the Vixens in Victoria is also seen in her story. During a conversation about what potential barriers may be in the way of her achieving her goals, LJ puts most of the weight on her marks at school but also leaving home. She tells me:

I'm like a very homely person and I rely on my parents a lot... And I have horses and I know this makes me sound like a two year old but I would struggle to leave them. Well, it's more leaving my commitments and they are a commitment because I made a commitment to them so leaving them would be like, 'see you later guys, thanks for being here for a whole 10 years, now I'm goin'.

LJ then explains that it would be a lot easier if she could study to become a veterinarian without leaving home because she could stay with her family and horses, but adds to the end of the explanation:

But, I'm not going to be riding horses forever, I would like to be, but I'm not going to get a career out of riding horses - I am going to get a career out of being a vet. So it's prioritising, I suppose.

This is the first time that I come to realise that show jumping may also be a future goal LJ has, but she has dismissed it as unrealistic or not possible as a career pathway. I find this interesting because during the third interview she says to me, *I suppose as long as you try hard, then anything is possible*. LJ also tells me that she believes *that if you really want something in life then you will do your best to get there*. This makes me wonder if LJ has decided that she doesn't really want it because it's not a possibility. So, in a sense, this suggests that not everything is actually possible. I don't think, however, that LJ thought about it like this. But, perhaps she saw a career as a show jumper in this local context as not a possibility even if she did try really hard.

LJ doesn't talk about many of her underlying affective motivations during the course of our interviews. She does mention, however, wanting to *learn from every*

experience, gain knowledge and have fun. She also talks about getting involved, helping and getting out there in the big wide world. When I ask her what she thinks she would be doing if she were living ‘the good life’ she tells me, Maybe having a flat with some friends or something or just travelling. You know, being a vet and earning money... just having opportunities to do that would be a good life.

LJ is happy with her current life circumstances and enjoying everything that she does. Following our time together, I gather that she is very comfortable with her situation and sees a future for herself that is a projection of what she is currently doing and what she is most interested in. In between the second and third interviews with LJ, I meet with her mother and her school principal.

I ask LJ’s mother what her hopes are for her daughter’s future and she says, *I guess just to fulfil what she wants to do, and she wants to be a vet. She knows that she’s got to study big-time and she knows that she’s got to get good marks to do that...* I later ask her if she thinks anything has influenced LJ wanting to become a vet at all and she answers, *No, because since she was really little she’s always wanted to be a vet. And I guess it’s just because we’re off a farm and always been around animals. That’s all I can say, yeah, ‘cause I’ve never really pushed it, it’s been her decision. So I guess it is just because we’re involved with animals...*

LJ’s mother explains to me that she believes she has played a part in her daughter’s interest in animals, particularly horses, and her interest in sports, especially netball – mainly through these being her own passions and exposing them to experiences with horses and netball. She tells me that when she was her daughter’s age she wanted to become a police officer on horseback but she couldn’t afford to move away to do that. She sees LJ playing netball in the future at a competitive level and she sees her continuing on with her show jumping. LJ’s mother also relates to me that she envisions her daughter *will certainly go on to school and if she doesn’t become a vet, she will branch off into zoo keeper or something else...* like working for national parks. She concludes with, *I can see her being outdoors, she’s not an indoors person.*

LJ’s mother explains that she is worried about her daughter securing good enough grades for entry into a veterinary science degree and also says, *she knows she’s got to*

knuckle down and I am a bit frightened that she won't knuckle down. Part of this concern she tells me is that when LJ goes to college she will need to take more responsibility for her learning and become more independent and self-motivated and she is not sure that her daughter will do this. Following expressing this concern, however, she adds, *She might surprise me. She might be completely different, be really focused, but we'll wait and see.*

I learn from LJ's mother that they are worried about their daughter going to the mainland to study at such a young age and that she is hopeful that her other daughters may relocate so that LJ is in Perth with them. If LJ does eventually complete her college studies and continue on to university, she will be one of few from Holland High in Bayside to do so.

According to the school principal, for example, the more traditional pathway for young people in the community is into the workforce rather than onto higher education. During an informal interview, he also explains, *I think there are not high expectations, I think there is this notion of 'we work'.* He tells me that the students who do go on to college studies from Holland High, do so *with the skills of motivation, initiative, self direction, and self confidence* which he believes *are the attributes of an effective learner.* The school principal explains that preparing the students with the skills to become an *independent learner* is important but he also says that he is *not convinced they have the high level of knowledge that you would get in perhaps a more traditional school.*

I learn from the principal that Holland High offers programs that other schools do not, partially due to the diverse backgrounds of the students at the school. From our conversations I assume that the focus is therefore on building the students' capacity to engage with education and learning with the hope that they move on and increase their knowledge base after high school. The school-to-work culture of the Bayside community appears to be a strong one and I get the impression from the school principal that students from Holland High who complete college, let alone university, are 'exceptions to the rule'.

LJ has always known that she wanted to be a vet. This is largely connected to her experiences growing up on a farm and her being able to identify with being a country girl. Based on our conversations, however, it is possible there may be a few different pathways that LJ takes prior to embarking on six years of further schooling following college. LJ has a strong connection to home and her current life and may therefore find it very difficult to leave what she has now. What she has now is a happy life of fun and freedom in the maize paddocks at the back of the farm with her friends, riding her horses and playing netball. LJ Cooper may one day become a *veterinarian who works outdoors* and mostly *with big animals*, but this may be preceded by a gap year or two prior to this. For LJ, the gap year offers an opportunity for time to gain some independence through work and develop the psychological and emotional strength to leave home for university.

Ella Gilmore – Moving forward

Ella is 15 years old and lives with her mother, stepfather and younger sister in the isolated community of Lincoln Hills. Ella moved to Lincoln Hills from South Australia five years ago and prior to this time she lived in New South Wales. The town is situated approximately 90 kilometres from the closest regional centre, which has a population of around 20,000 people. In Lincoln Hills, access to a range of educational, employment, health, housing and leisure services and resources is limited.

According to Ella's school principal, despite some pockets of wealth in Lincoln Hills and the surrounding towns, there is a high level of *poverty and social disadvantage* and many families are *chronically unemployed and have been for generations*. Ella is in Grade 9 at Kilpatrick District High School, which provides primary and secondary level education to fewer than 150 students from Lincoln Hills and nearby towns.

Ella's stepfather works in an information technology role at the local mine and is the sole income provider in the household. From various conversations with Ella, I assume that he has secured this position through previous work experience with computers that spans over 20 years. Her stepfather earns what Ella says is *a lot of money*, despite not appearing to have a tertiary level qualification. Since finishing

high school, Ella's mother has devoted all of her time to raising her children, apart from a short period where she worked in a hotel. Ella has a younger sister who is still in primary school and an older sister who is 25 and lives on the mainland. Ella also has another older sister and an older brother, whom she prefers not to talk about.

The first time that I meet with Ella she says to me, *I love shopping, hanging out with friends, playing games with my little sister, listening to music, watching movies, and munging⁵ [sic] out on junk*. I also learn at this time that she really enjoys walking her dog and likes to get out of town on the weekends to shop, go to the cinema and go to the beach. Ella tells me that she is hoping to secure part-time work at the local supermarket as soon as a position becomes available.

During a later interview, Ella describes herself as *kind and shy* and tells me, *I don't just open up to people and just start chatting away*. Ella tells me that she comes across as *a happy and cheerful student* but she explains that *it's sort of like a cover, being cheerful all the time*. She further explains that she likes people to see her *happy side* because she tends to *get down a lot*. Ella also describes herself as *stubborn at times* and mentions being *average at everything*. During my time with Ella I see her *get down*, and I see her get quite serious at times. However, I also see this *happy-side* and a cheeky and funny aspect of her personality.

Ella has brown eyes and shoulder length light brown hair that is styled differently every time that we meet. Some days it is dead straight and on these occasions, her jaw lines look strong and she comes across a lot more serious and mature. Some days her hair is casually tied back and her eyes look less intense and there is a flickering of mischief that may be seen in them. And then, at other times, her hair has a deliberately messy look to it and this is matched with a big smile that hides her strong jaw lines. I call it the changing face of Ella Gilmore.

As part of the fieldwork for the research, I meet with Ella on three occasions. During these meetings, I discover that Ella has many aspirations in life. Some of her future goals may be seen by the reader as fantasies, and Ella herself sometimes refers to

⁵ 'Munging' is a colloquial term used to mean 'over-indulging' in food

them as *dreams* and at other times she refers to them as *possibilities*. I suspect this is partly due to her age. I think that she is still in the process of navigating her way through what is possibly a ‘fantasy stage’. She appears to be trying to construct a future vision of herself in realistic roles but appears to still want to hold on to her *dreams*. In saying this, there are times that I see a certain look or expression and I wonder if Ella is toying with me. At these times, Ella briefly glances at me out of the corner of her eye and then quickly looks downwards.

Ella’s story begins with the first statement that she makes to me at our initial day of meeting, following introductions. From there, I have woven together numerous personal stories from across the three interviews and constructed her life story regarding her aspirations in her own words. This is the voice of Ella Gilmore:

I’ve put a lot of thought into what I want to do because my parents, they want me to get far in life and have a good career and over the years it has changed so many times. I’ve gone from wanting to be a vet, hairdresser, movie star and yeah, most recent one I want to join the air force and just train up in that area and hopefully be a chef or something. And um, ‘cause they pay for all your schooling and all your living expenses and everything and it's got a lot of advantages there.

A couple of years ago, every year we have workforce people come in and they set up all these stalls in our hall and they show you what different jobs you can get. And one was the air force or the army and there was this guy and he said he gets put overseas and he gets to go to Hawaii and go to all these really cool places to do work and stuff. He was a diver or something. That was the first time I really thought about that and then at the start of this year a lady from the air force came to our school and she was talking about it and mum and dad said that’s a really good way to go and we will support you and yeah, I’ve always wanted to travel the world.

I want to go and do all this adventurous stuff like sky dive and bungee jump and parasail. And, I want to do all that and just really get out there and I want to travel the world. I’ve always wanted to travel the world and I want to go to Disneyland and I want to go to Paris and there’s a lot of things that I want to do in life. And the defence force, I know that that’s definitely a good opportunity to travel the world

because they shift you overseas and yeah, they pay for everything for you and at the same time you're learning and getting life experiences and be able to get your own job and everything.

I do want to go to college. To Gilchrist. Because I think, from what dad's told me, if you do Grade 11 and 12 when you go to join the defence force you go directly up the ranks. I'm not entirely sure about that though. Because the lady that came and talked to us about it, she said when she was in school, she surfed a lot more than she studied. And it was just easy for her to go to a trade in the defence force.

In the back of my head, I've always wanted to be an adventurous, sporty, out there kind of girl but I haven't really got an opportunity to do that. So I think that's something that I might like to try just to see if I like it or not. I know I will like to play with guns. Can't wait for that, yeah. And, a few of my friends said they would really like to do it as well. It's a good opportunity. It's good money and they pay for your accommodation, there's so much opportunity from it.

Um, these aspirations, I always get it from somewhere. Like being a vet, um, I remember my nan bought me a book and it was in this series. James Patterson wrote it and the main character in the book she was a vet and it was my favourite book at the time, so I want to be a vet, sort of in my own fantasy world, like, 'hey, one day'. I just like the idea of helping animals get better if they are sick and because mum and dad have always encouraged me to do something good with my life and they have said, 'you really have to buckle down and study at school and get your grades up'.

When I talked to mum and dad about it, they said, maybe you can open up your own little vet place and mum and dad said they would be happy to help out there when they get retired and stuff and I just thought it would be cool. And when our cat was sick we would always have to travel up to Langley and it was really busy and it was hard to get in. And mum and dad thought at the time that it was a good idea if I wanted to open up somewhere [locally] where people could get easy access to the vet.

And, photographic journalist. Last year I entered a competition for school and we had to take a photo for something, I can't remember what it was but it ended up being in the calendar [locally]. So, we had to take a photo for school and me and my friends

we went to the skate park and we were taking heaps and heaps of photos and we entered it in on the very last day that you could and we ended up coming runner up and that was like a really big shock and I won a big art pack and everything. That's where the photographic part came from and then journalist because last year I was really good at English and literacy. That was something that I really liked to do even though it would stress me out at times, not getting assignments in on time and stuff, I would really, um, I've really tried to write good stories and do really well.

Mum and dad suggest that I could be a photographic journalist because I've always wanted to travel the world and dad said, you know, 'If you join National Geographic you could go all over the world taking photos and you could write stuff for books and everything'. That would, I thought that was pretty cool. Um. Oh, and I've always wanted to be on TV so being a journalist you get to be on TV and stuff, so yeah.

Nursing, that's one thing that my neighbour across the road, she said that's a good one to get into because a girl from this school, or a girl she used to know in Lincoln Hills, she got into nursing and she said that was really good. And I think I've just got that sort of tending thing about me and like looking after people and um, I think that would be fun.

I've got those places [Hawaii and Paris] as two places that I really want to go to. I don't know why, I just really like Hawaii and I want to get married there one day. Well, maybe just another aspiration, or little dream I've always had in the back of my head, is being a surfer. I really really like Stephanie Gilmore. Um, being a surfer, I just love the beach and being one of those really cool tomboy type of girls. I love the beach, it's the best place in the world, especially in summer. And Paris, I really want to live in Paris because it's just so romantic there. And everyone speaks French. One of my teachers back in Grade 7, she was teaching me how to play the piano and she could speak French and she was a really big inspiration to me. And I remember she went away to Europe or England or somewhere like that and when she was travelling back she travelled through France and she said she would have conversations in French and when the class was being really loud she would speak in French just to get everyone's attention and they would be like, 'what are you doing?' You know, so yeah.

And I just want to lose my fear of heights and I just want to get out there and really do adventurous things. Skydiving, I've always wanted to do that. Parasailing, because when I see it on TV it looks like so much fun. Um, get married on a beach in Hawaii and have a boy and a girl. I've just got a few things like bungee jump, skydive, go skiing...

And um, get a super hot, kind, considerate, very funny boyfriend [reads from the artefact page]. Yeah that's just the sort of dream guy that I would love to have one day, um. And I think ADF that's the way to go because from what I've heard they've got a lot of athletic and very attractive guys in there and yeah, can't wait for that. Yeah, just this imaginary guy that I want to have one day, and oh, by the time I'm 30, or after 30, I definitely want to have my own island with jet skis, indoor pools and outdoor bars and a glass mansion with servants and private French chefs of course. And what was it, yeah my neighbour, she said, um, one of her son's friends he got married and he was in the military and they had a really nice military style wedding that had all the soldiers there with their guns and just that whole Australian defence force thing, and the money, there's just so many things that appeal to me about it... be in a high ranked position in the ADF and earn lots of money. Because my dad said you're really respected when you've done a lot of really good things in the ADF and you've really earned your position. And if you want to leave the ADF when you go out in the real world then you are respected. And that's something that I do want. I don't just want to be like some check-out chick my whole life and you know, I want to have a good living and, yeah.

I think that's probably the easiest option [defence force]. I'll have to go through university for all the rest. I might have to go through university for the defence force as well but I think just getting out of school I reckon that's probably the best option for now. Like just to get my own place and stand on my own two feet and then pursue all the rest after that, in the future. The ADF. Definitely. That's what I will end up doing. And I know that. Like I have all these other little dreams, but that's what I'll end up doing. Yeah, it's a good opportunity there and it's good just to get me on my feet and get me some experience.

The above story shows Ella's desires for *experience* and to *get far in life*. She wants to take up *opportunities* which she often talks about and become more self sufficient and independent. During my time with Ella I sometimes sense that she is holding back. I think she has reservations about venturing outside of her comfort zone in Lincoln Hills but she also desires adventure and experience at the same time. This adventure and experience, Ella knows, is not something she will have access to in Lincoln Hills.

Ella tells me that she believes people should *keep moving forward* and explains that in part, this means *don't focus on all the bad things*. From our conversations, I think she also believes that this means you should take hold of opportunities when they present themselves. When Ella talks about opportunity, it is nearly always when she talks about the armed forces. She tells me that her parents are also encouraging this pathway more so than any other pathway at this current point in time. Ella also identifies herself as being *an adventurous, sporty, out there kind of girl* who would *like driving tanks* and *would like to play with guns*.

I think that despite some of the conversations with Ella containing 'dreams', the pathway that she takes will be the one where she sees the most likely chances of fulfilling multiple aspirations at once, including some of these 'dreams'. For instance, she herself has already attached *travelling the world, doing adventurous things, having a hot boyfriend, surfing in Hawaii, earning lots of money and getting lots of life experiences* with the armed forces. Most of these ideas stem from her exposure to the idea of this from army recruitment personnel visiting the school regularly over the last four years. I also learn from Ella that the school social worker gave her an army information booklet to read through following the most recent visit.

Ella may initially enrol in college but based on my time with her, I sense that her desire to join the armed forces when she turns 17 years old is very strong. I would like to think that Ella has her *own island one day with jet skis, indoor pools and outdoor bars* and *a private French chef*, but when she tells me these 'dreams' during our interview, it is on one of the days that her hair is pulled back casually and she has that flicker of mischief in her eyes. I know that a part of her knows these dreams are fairy tale ones, but when she talks about the armed forces, it is no fairy tale to her – it is

real and so is everything that she attaches to this aspiration – right down to the surfing in Hawaii on a regular basis.

Bianca Patterson – Welcome to my world (self titled)

Bianca is a street-savvy, articulate 14 year old girl who lives in the small town of Lennon Rock. This is not far from Kilpatrick District High in the isolated mining town of Lincoln Hills where she attends school. The first time I meet Bianca I am instantly drawn to her. At our initial meeting, she studies me and my words carefully. I sense something about her and a feeling that we will somehow have a connection. Bianca comes across as an ‘old soul’. I use this term, as I notice there is a level of depth and complexity in Bianca’s character that usually comes from experience.

One of the first questions Bianca asks me is, *when will you be back?* I think she is gauging the possibility of being let down by an ‘outsider’ – an ‘outsider’ who may not make the 90 kilometre journey back. I know that I need to build a trusting relationship with Bianca and that this is a priority.

Bianca has not always lived in Lennon Rock and has travelled around Australia and lived in various places along the way. Her parents separated when she was five years old and Bianca’s mother has been the primary care provider since this time. Bianca’s mother has a tertiary qualification in teaching and various vocational qualifications associated with health and wellbeing and remedial therapy. Her mother is self-employed and manages her own business. Bianca is unaware of her father’s location and her mother is therefore her sole source of support, including income support.

I learn that Bianca is in Year 9, she hates school, her attendance is poor and she never wears a school uniform. I realise very early into our conversations that ‘disengaged’ is not really a strong enough word to describe Bianca’s relationship with her school world. Bianca tells me that she argues a lot with her mother about getting out of bed. She tells me that she feels school is pointless because she doesn’t learn anything when she is there. These feelings are fuelled by a combination of factors; however, I realise that the key contributing one is that school is not stimulating for her. Bianca, for example, relates that she is bored and that her *school is basic and with limited education and not much discipline*. She has little interest in the class activities and she

appears to be ‘at risk’ of early school leaving. Despite this, Bianca is a very intelligent young girl who tells me she thinks she will go to college and possibly even university. When I ask Bianca about her interests, she initially tells me that she has none. As time goes on, however, I learn that she does. She just doesn’t realise it. At the beginning of our second interview, Bianca shows me an artefact that contains the words of her favourite poem glued onto cardboard and decorated with ‘henna’ symbols. She tells me the poem is *Question by May Swensen* and then she proceeds to read it to me,

*Body my house
my horse my hound
what will I do
when you are fallen*

*Where will I sleep
How will I ride
What will I hunt*

*Where can I go
without my mount
all eager and quick
How will I know
in thicket ahead
is danger or treasure
when Body my good
bright dog is dead*

*How will it be
to lie in the sky
without roof or door
and wind for an eye*

*With cloud for shift
how will I hide?*

Bianca then explains to me,

It was actually at the start of a book and I read it and it just kind of stuck in my head. I really like it. I don't know, it's kind of interesting and it's about, well, what will she do when she loses everything?

I think that the poem interests Bianca firstly because of the way it is written and secondly because of the meaning behind it. The poem has sparked an emotion within her and made her think about how she would feel if she were to *lose everything*. When showing me another artefact Bianca explains,

It's my favourite quote out of my favourite book. 'It is not in him to be loved like me, how can she love in him, what he has not?' Wuthering Heights. I really like the old kind of books, the old language and everything. The old setting...

Despite having earlier said that she has no interests, it becomes clear to me that she does. She likes poetry and she likes *the old kind of books*. I learn during our time together that she also enjoys murder/mystery and science fiction, among a range of other things. The next artefact that Bianca shows me is one that is titled, '*When I'm gone*' and I learn that the lyrics pasted on the page are those to a song [see Appendix 15]. I did not know how to interpret the lyrics at the time of the interview and I still am not entirely sure. All I know is that the song has meaning to Bianca because she tells me,

It's my favourite song by Eminem and I don't know, I've just always liked this song and I know a few people that do. But I actually remember when I was little and mum left dad and this came on the radio and it kind of reminded me of what I was going through at the time. So I could relate to it and I kind of liked it.

When I look at the artefact, I know that Bianca is trying to tell me something about herself. Not just something about how she felt at the time that her parents separated but something about how she still feels. Some of the verses include lines such as the

following, *'when I'm gone, just carry on, don't mourn'* and *'the curtain is closing on me'*. I believe the song is about the difficulty in leaving those you love.

I later realise further what Bianca is trying to tell me with some of these artefacts when she asks me to listen to a song. The song is called *'Welcome to my world'*. Bianca later asks me to name her life story after this song, which is performed by the Sick Puppies. The song contains lines, such as *'Welcome to my world, where everyone I ever need always ends up leaving me alone'* and *'you leave me out on the curb just like everyone else before you'*.

I believe that Bianca fears being 'left alone'. I think she is anxious of *losing everything* and being left *out on the curb*. I am very conscious of this during my time with her and I also believe it plays a very large part in her current focus on securing relationships and friendships ahead of her education. Bianca's concern in life at this moment in time centres on spending as much time as she can with her boyfriend and her other friends. I think this is connected with her wanting to decrease the possibilities of being left alone. She tells me that she *hates being alone* and she has *always wanted someone there* and connects this mostly with wanting to *'settle down'*. During this conversation Bianca is also quick to explain, however, that she doesn't *'need'* anyone and that she is quite independent.

Bianca wants to secure friendships and relationships at this point in time over any other goal. Despite prioritising this, Bianca has many aspirations. These are all shaped by numerous experiences in her world, most notably those experiences that include her mother. The aspiration highest on the priority list for Bianca, following securing relationships, is to *travel the world*. She tells me that she sees herself in the future as someone who travels widely. I also learn from her that she wants to *experience many things*. She connects these goals with what her mother has done. Bianca tells me that others describe her mum as a gypsy and she also sees her future self in a similar way. Despite her desires to travel, Bianca explains that she will also continue on with her education after Year 10 and this may include university because she will probably *have to*. Bianca wants a career and sees herself managing her own business, like her mother does now and always has done and knows this requires some level of education.

The following is Bianca's story in her own words. I have constructed it using the personal stories and artefacts collected during our three interviews together.

I live in Lennon Rock. I was born in Brisbane and then I was raised on the Gold Coast. And then from ages eight to 12 I lived in Victoria. And then for about six months I travelled Australia with mum and was home schooled with mum... I think we went from Brisbane to Horsham to Adelaide to Darwin and back down to Alice Springs and back across to Brisbane. I did a circle of those five states. That was pretty fun. I've had a birthday in just about every state. I've had a birthday in Queensland and New South Wales and Victoria and South Australia and my ninth birthday was in Alice Springs and an Aboriginal gave me a didgeridoo for my birthday [smiling]. I've still got that. Mum likes to travel and get to see new things.

I probably learnt more on the road than I did in the classroom because at that stage I wasn't really focused at school. So, she [mum] decided to home-school me and learn about Australia. She likes teaching me about different ways of living. I got to learn different ways of life and I got to see the Aboriginals in the Northern Territory and got to live like them for a little while. It was good we got to meet all different kinds of people...I kind of take everything for granted and mum tried to show me that it's not so bad, what I've got.

I kind of miss travelling and stuff but we used to move every six months or so and it got a bit annoying. But now we've been here about 18 months or so and it's nice but I get bored of living here because there's nothing really here. And I'm used to big cities where there's lots to do. Or travelling and getting new stuff all the time...She [mother] always said after or on my 16th birthday or something she would take me overseas, but when we've finished Australia. We have almost finished Australia, we just need to go to WA and then we have travelled all of Australia. And then she said she would take me overseas and so I've always had it in me that I wanted to see the world. Like see more and learn more and different cultures and everything.

I wanted to go to Africa at one stage and I think mum was thinking about, you know how you go over to Fiji and you help them build their houses and you live there? She was setting that up for me when I finish Grade 10 for a little while. Like, over

summer. She was going to set it up and then we were going to go over there and do that or something...you get to sort of see life through their eyes. I suppose see how they have things and how we take things for granted. So I get to see what the difference is. And I've always wanted to go to England and see my dad's family. Because my dad's family are from England and I haven't met them. Well I haven't seen him in ages either, so I just want to go and have a look over there and see what life's like and stuff over there too.

After Grade 10 I want to continue my education but I still want to have fun with my friends. But after Grade 12 I want to travel and start a career and by the time I am 30 I want to settle down with someone. I don't really want to do anything but I want to, if that makes sense. I don't like having to go to school or studying or having to work but I have to. I want to travel, see more of the world. I want to have a good career and I want to be able to afford everything that I have in life. And I don't want to have a basic job. I want to have opportunities. But it's also something that I will probably struggle with because I hate school. And, I hate being told what to do. Mum and I probably get in fights about it all the time. That I have to go to school. Every morning it's an argument to get me out of bed.

I guess she [mum] has shown that learning is important and that you need to learn more but I don't know if it is going to influence me much because I hate school and I hate learning and I hate being here pretty much. Although, she has shown me that it is possible to do it if you want to, but it has been harder for her because she had me at uni with her and everything. And she was still working...she was a stay at home mum when she was with my dad but after she left him she got her massage qualification and so she would have to take me with her. So she would work through the day or go to uni and then study at night and everything. So she has sort of shown that you may as well do it while you have the opportunity because it always gets harder.

I used to be close to her [mother] but the last year I haven't been close with her because it's probably the last year that I haven't cared about my education and stuff as much. The last year I've just kind of wanted to have fun. So I've been going out and having fun more with my friends instead of caring. Because I kind of grew up pretty fast and now I'm not, if you know what I mean?

Um, jobs I've wanted. I've wanted to be a hairdresser and a beauty therapist because I grew up with mum in beauty salons and everything... So in the beauty salons I was able to be a girl and that's probably where I learnt to be girly. The beauty therapist taught me how to do my makeup and the hairdresser how to do my hair... I've wanted to be a psychologist because I like psychology. I always ask people a million questions about what they are thinking and drive them crazy because I like to know how people think and everything... I was actually thinking about studying some minor psychology this year but the course didn't start in time. I pretty much like knowing what people think about and I'm kind of interested in the way people see things. I'm thinking about the psychology of teenagers. They think about everything differently and they view everything differently. I'm pretty sure all my friends get annoyed 'cause I ask them what they're thinking and what they think about something and all that is kind of interesting to me. And I like to try and work people out...well, around here it probably interests me more because there are so many people doing bad things, like the teenagers and drugs. And I probably surround myself with the wrong crowd. I don't join in, I just sort of observe it, if you know what I mean. And I kind of wonder why they do it and that kind of thing. It kind of interests me...

I've thought about being a doctor because I'm smart and I'm one of the only girls who doesn't get grossed out by blood and stuff. We cut up sheep eyes yesterday and I was having fun cutting them up and the girls were in the corner puking... As I've been growing up I've always been told you can be anything. You can be a doctor, you can be a lawyer. And doctors, like the profession, they show it's the highest profession you can have kind of thing...Um, a scientific anthropologist because I'm into crime and all that. And it's like the doctor of the dead people. Or a coroner, or a journalist because I'm good at writing. These are just random jobs that I've thought about.

The scientific anthropologist is because I'm interested in murder-mystery and everything. I've always been interested in working things out and solving the puzzle kind of thing. And one of the ultimate things is the murder and working it out and using clues from the body and the death and it just interests me because I like problem solving... I used to watch shows like that on TV and read the murder-mystery books that got recommended to me and I kind of worked it out that's the thing I liked.

I always wanted to be a journalist because I was good at writing. And I liked telling my side of the story and having my say. It's just something that I found an easy way to do that...When I was little I used to make my own newspaper and give it to mum and everything. So I used to make my own, um I probably wouldn't do that as much these days because I hate English.

When I was little I used to make like fake businesses. So mum would have her own business and I would get paper and be a real estate agent and make all these houses for sale and then try and sell them to mum and everything. I used to have every business and run it myself because when I was little I used to help mum with the paperwork and profit and loss statements. So I've always helped run a business but only little bits. I've been kind of shown how they're run...

Mum's influenced everything. Because she has always had her own companies and I've seen...so I've been shown that you can have it all. You can have your own company and that kind of thing. So I want to have something of my own and be in charge of it. And I think that may be the way to go if I hate being told what to do [pauses] – I wouldn't last.

Everyone expects me to do something [pauses]. Because I've got potential they expect me to do something good, have a good job and try really hard. But the more people kind of expect of me the less I want to do things. Because I don't really like just exceeding people's expectations I want to do it for me. So the more someone tells me to do something then the less likely that I'm gonna because I'm very stubborn like that.

I think about things like, never sacrifice your smile. Make everything fun. If it's not fun it's not worth doing but that's not good because not everything in life is fun and I know that but I don't want to do it if it isn't. This is probably one thing that slows me down from getting what I want. Because I don't like school and I want to have fun and so I don't want to be here...but, I don't want just a basic dead end job for the rest of my life...

The above story highlights how Bianca realises that education is important because she doesn't want a *basic dead end job for the rest of her life*. She talks about

education as something she *doesn't want to do*, but *has to do* and even communicates college and university aspirations despite her current disengagement with school. It is difficult to anticipate what Bianca may or may not do with her future education and work as it appears that she is currently most concerned with living in the moment and maintaining the relationship she has with her boyfriend and relationships with her peers. It also appears that her desires to *travel the world* and *see how they have things and how we take things for granted* are more of a priority for her at this moment in time than education is. I wonder how closely Bianca's eventual pathway will match that of her mothers. I think about her settling down with her current boyfriend; travelling after completing college; and then fulfilling her university aspirations much later in life. This, however, is not what her mother hopes for:

I think the lessons that I have tried to teach her about what happens if you rush into marriage and children is that you go to uni with a five year old. I don't think she realizes that that was hard work. I don't think that she gets that I am trying to stop her being the same. I think that she sees it that she can run amok now the same as mum did and catch up later. I think she is missing the point that it is frigging hard work, if you do everything else before you do your education. She looks like she is on the same path as I was. The only comfort I get from that is that I survived it. And I learnt from it. But, I must not have broken the pattern if she is doing it...

When I met with Bianca's mother it was a very emotional interview and she communicates early her disappointment and frustrations with not knowing what her daughter wants, stating, *I probably need to go and read her book because you probably know what she wants to do and I don't know*. I explain that I am most interested in what she would like to see her daughter do, not what she believes her daughter's aspirations are. The following is pieced together from a collection of responses to questions about the hopes that Bianca's mother has for her daughter:

I'm honestly not sure that I know what Bianca wants to do...her and I have lost touch. Hopefully by doing this project with you, it will give her the chance to re-think about what it is...she can't be bothered getting out of bed to go to school at the moment so we haven't really had, 'what are you going to do with your life', it's more like, 'let's just get you out of bed'...I don't know if this is realistic, but I would like her to go

back to the plan she had a few years ago. She was always wanting, well, it was always assumed that she was going to go to university. The last two years in Tassie [sic], though, has become, 'let's just assume she does Grade 12', 'let's hope she does Grade 10'...I guess my hope for her is that she goes back and remembers what she did want when she started high school. And she always wanted to go to uni. She wasn't sure what she wanted to do but she knew she wanted a good paid job and to be in management, not be a check-out chick. So, my hope is that she remembers that she had dreams. And hopefully they are coming back out again...I hope that she will do everything. I just want her to put in a nice timeline and get her education... I guess I hope she finds what she is passionate about. Because if you have a passionate career, life becomes a lot easier.

Bianca's mother *hopes that she [her daughter] will do everything* but she does not want her daughter to prioritise other goals over her education and have the same pathway that she had in terms of the order that she fulfilled aspirations. More importantly, however, it appears that what she hopes for most is for Bianca to *'remember that she had dreams'*. In other conversations I learn from Bianca's mother that she also wants her daughter to *'believe in something'* and *'find her truth'*. The above highlights the frustration of a mother who has *lost touch* with her daughter and desperately wants to reconnect and support her with her decision-making around her future. The conversations with Bianca's mother, not all of which are included here, demonstrate that maternal aspirations centre on happiness, a career of passion and economic security through a good job, but these also branch out to include much deeper felt hopes for personal discovery and development as a person. If Bianca does fulfil her mother's most heart-felt hopes, particularly *'to find her truth'* and *'remember she has dreams'* it is possible that she may *never have to sacrifice her smile*, which will mean she fulfils her most valued aspiration in life.

5. The shared aspirations and experiences of rural girls

“I think the good life is when you have a good family and good friends and you’ve got what you wanted in life but not too much of it...” [Lucy]

The themes, ‘surface level’ aspirations and experiences

Determining the shared themes, shared aspirations and shared experiences

Shared themes and aspirations were identified in this study through an analysis that involved in-vivo, values and narrative coding of all personal stories and the artefacts that contained language that were collected from the girls (see Chapter Three for details). As the interview data collected from the girls totals approximately 200,000 words, not all of the personal stories are woven through the life history portraits in Chapter Four due to purpose, time and space (see Wolcott, 1983). The themes presented in this chapter have therefore been determined based on an analysis and coding of all data collected from the girls, rather than an analysis of the actual life histories alone. Some of the shared themes and the related shared findings presented in this chapter may therefore appear to the reader as less obvious and not based purely on the previous chapter. Quotes are used to support the key shared findings, but to avoid repetition as much as possible, some of these are abbreviated versions of longer personal stories.

The shared findings were determined through the coding of the language and word choice used by the girls and the coding of values statements, repetitions and re-occurring events across all interviews and artefacts containing language (see Saldana, 2009). Particular attention was given to coding what language and word choice was used by the girls when talking about various aspirations to assist in understanding of the underlying motivation or meaning behind these.

The girls' desires for happiness, success, independence and balance are the underlying affective motivations behind all of their future goals. As these were identified through the thematic analysis and coding of the personal stories and artefacts collected, they are the overall meta-themes in this study. In addition to this, the coding of the girls' personal stories identified nine themes which appear underneath the meta-themes. These are also underlying affective motivations behind many of the girls' aspirations that run across most of the personal stories. These include desires for opportunity, self-reliance, control, flexibility, fulfilment, contribution, growth, discovery, recognition, security and comfort. Guided by Brown (2011), the themes in this study are reflective of the emotional aspects of the girls' aspirations and therefore illustrate the affective component of all shared 'surface level' goals. The author refers to these themes as underlying affective motivations or underlying affective aspirations from here on in.

All of the themes stem from coding blocks of text surrounding the girls' 'surface level' aspirations, which are 'concrete' goals, including those for education, careers, travel, relationships, parenthood and lifestyle. Shared aspirations include those that appear in the majority of the personal stories collected from the girls in this study. These were also identified through the thematic analysis and include shared aspirations for college and university; careers of passion (stimulating careers that involve engaging in tasks that are of particular interest); owning a business; careers that involve helping; travel; motherhood; marriage; and '*a nice house*'.

Some of the girls have aspirations for careers in journalism, veterinary science and the armed forces, and aspirations for humanitarian aid work and taking a gap year. Although these may not be classified as 'shared' by the majority of girls, they are considered important inclusions in this chapter based on the interconnections they have with the girls' shared aspirations for helping and their aspirations for travel.

These shared 'surface level' aspirations are all inspired by the girls' underlying emotional desires for happiness, success, independence, balance, opportunity, self-reliance, control, flexibility, fulfilment, contribution, growth, discovery, recognition, security and comfort.

The analysis indicated that the girls' aspirations for education and careers are mainly related to the themes of opportunity, self-reliance, fulfilment, control, flexibility, recognition and contribution. When the girls talk about their aspirations for education and careers, for example, they use language such as *'because you need it'* to be able to have more choices and it is a necessary requirement if you want to *'go really far'* *'have enough money'* and have *'a good job'*. In conversations about careers, the girls also typically refer to wanting *'a career that you love'* and believe it is important to *'do what means a lot to you'*. References are also made to the importance of making a contribution to the world or *'giving back'* and *'making a difference'* and the girls typically connect this with careers that involve helping but also to humanitarian aid or volunteer work. Travel and humanitarian aid aspirations for the girls in this study are mainly connected to the themes of growth, discovery and contribution. When the girls talk about their aspirations for travel, aid work and a gap year, for example, references are typically made to wanting to *'get out there'*, *'see'* and *'experience'* with terminology around *'helping'* when talking about aid work. The girls' shared aspirations for marriage, motherhood and *'a nice house'* are linked more to the themes of security and comfort and most of the language is about *'having someone'*, not wanting to *'be alone'* and having a *'good life'*. The thematic analysis and coding revealed that all of these shared aspirations are linked first and foremost to the girls' desires for happiness, success, independence and balance.

The girls in this study have multiple life aspirations and many of these are interconnected. Some of this may be seen in this chapter; however, the focus is to detail what the girls' shared 'surface level' aspirations are and to demonstrate how these are shaped by their community, school, family and peer worlds. The chapter elucidates what their shared aspirations are and provides insights into how aspects of culture such as traditions, expectations, values, norms and understandings shape these. The influence of significant individuals, particularly mothers, sisters and other female role models, is clear in this chapter. Another focus of this chapter is to illustrate throughout how these aspirations are interconnected with the over-arching themes identified through the analysis, or what are referred to by the author as the girls' 'underlying affective aspirations'.

The shared findings focuses firstly on the goals that the girls typically report as a priority for their early adulthood lives, followed by those goals reported by the girls as most hoped for later in their lives. The girls in this study all focused on the ‘here and now’, or their short-term goals, more so than those they held for later in life; hence the first section is more detailed than the second. Following the shared findings from the interviews with the girls, there is a section on the key messages obtained through the interviews with the school principals and the mothers. The chapter then concludes with key insights regarding the girls’ aspirations and their perceptions of higher education.

The girls’ shared aspirations for early adulthood

The Graduate, the Globetrotter and the Good Samaritan

All of the girls in this study, except for one, have college aspirations, nine of the girls have aspirations for careers requiring a university degree, all of the girls have travel aspirations and all of the girls apart from two, are considering careers related to helping. Careers within the health sector are discussed most often across the conversations with the girls, as are aspirations for owning a business and aspirations for careers of passion. Although not shared across the majority of stories, some of the girls talk about journalism, careers in veterinary science and/or joining the armed forces. This finding is included, as the girls who hold these aspirations connect them with travel or caring/helping aspirations. The study found that six of the girls have gap year aspirations and five of the girls have aspirations for humanitarian aid work. Although these are not in the ‘majority’ of the girls’ stories they are considered important inclusions based on the insights that they allow for and the connection these have with travel aspirations.

The girls’ educational aspirations are grouped under the banner of ‘The Graduate’ as the majority express aspirations to complete both college and university. ‘The Globetrotter’ classification applies to the girls’ shared travel aspirations, which are also interconnected with aspirations for humanitarian aid work and/or the gap year for some of the girls in this study as well as journalism and the armed forces. As the majority of the girls have aspirations for the helping careers, these are classified under

the banner of ‘The Good Samaritan’, which further applies to those girls who have aspirations for aid work. The insights from the shared findings in this study that fall within the three main aspirational headings for early adulthood of ‘The Graduate’, ‘The Globetrotter’ and ‘The Good Samaritan’ are presented below. The following illustrates that the girls’ early adulthood visions of themselves living successful, happy, independent and balanced lives largely include shared aspirations for graduating from college and university, travelling the world and engaging with careers related to helping.

The Graduate – College and University

All of the girls in this study, except for Beth, have aspirations for college and plans to complete Year 11 and 12 college studies ahead of any other educational or career-related goals. College is seen by most of the girls as something that you have to do, as it is compulsory or something that they will do because others before them have. The girls’ conversations around why they are planning on going to college demonstrate this perceived necessity and norm. One example that highlights this may be seen in the following response from Rose (Grade 10) when asked why she was going to attend college:

Well, it’s compulsory for one. And oh, I don’t know. It’s always been what happened. It’s what I’ve been used to. It hasn’t been something that you think about not going to college. Like Josie [older sister] she went to Gordon High and then moved on and went to Redbridge College for Years 11 and 12. And Anna [2nd eldest sister] has gone to Riverside College. Like, it’s just not something that I’m contemplating not doing. Yeah, it’s just always been there.

Many of the girls in this study talk in a similar way to Rose when discussing the reasons they have for wanting to attend college. Together with the perceived necessity and the norm, certain traditions, expectations and understandings from within the girls’ cultural worlds also influences decision-making around college. This may be seen in the above example with Rose, which highlights how a college education is perceived as compulsory due to the schooling requirement to attend until the age of 17

and as a family tradition. Rose mentions on other occasions that college completion is also an expectation that her mother has of her.

Similar references are made to expectations and traditions in college discussions by many of the girls in this study. Most of the girls report that it is expected of them to complete college, especially by their parents and sometimes by their teachers and friends. When asked about parental expectations, most of the girls relay that they believe their parents want them '*to succeed*'. For the majority of the girls in this study, success is linked with completing college and/or university as this will ensure self-reliance, fulfilment and happiness through having 'a good job', 'a career of passion' or 'earning enough money'.

From the point of view of the girls in this study, education is needed and college and university qualifications are seen as a means to increased opportunities. Other studies with adolescents and young people report a similar finding that education is perceived in an instrumentalist way, or as a means to an end, or something required to enable them 'to be something', 'to become somebody' or 'to have a good job' (e.g. Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2010; Alloway et al., 2004a; Ames, 2011; Baxter et al., 2007; Bok, 2010; Froerer, 2012; Sanders & Munford, 2008). The participants in the study by Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2010) expressed desires 'to be something', and this was connected with wanting 'opportunities' in life which they did not perceive to be possible if they had a 'dead end job' or opted for the pathway taken by their parents. Similar may be said for the majority of the girls in this study. This raises questions as to where this perception stems from.

Baxter et al. (2007) provide some insights around this as they report that the participants in their study held the perception that education was needed because of the influence of the AimHigher initiative in the UK. Teachers in the school world encouraged students and their families to consider 'aiming higher' and this then influenced the perception of education as needed (Baxter et al., 2007). A study with adolescent girls in India also reports that teachers were influential in shaping the perspective of education as needed (Froerer, 2012).

In this study, however, it appears to be an understanding that is largely transferred through the girls' mothers. The majority of the girls' mothers, for example, expect, hope and encourage their daughters to continue their education because it better ensures their chances of securing a good job/career they are passionate about. The mothers express disappointment with not having the opportunities to engage with education and their most desired career aspirations when they were their daughters' age and this appears to be behind the value they now place on this. Ames (2011) also reports this finding about the mothers' encouragement and support for their daughters to continue with their education due to not having the opportunity to do so themselves. Based on the findings in this study, the girls' aspirations for college and university are significantly influenced by the experiences that their mothers had and the subsequent maternal message transmitted to them from this, that education increases the opportunity to engage with a career that you will love.

Despite this understanding of the need for education to be fulfilled and happy, the girls' families highly value pathways that lead into the workforce from Year 10 through to Year 12. This is because quite often these are the pathways that they themselves have taken. Many of the conversations with the girls highlight a struggle between 'earning' and 'formal learning'. Evidence of this may be seen in the following taken from a conversation with Lauren (Grade 10) around parental expectations and support for university studies:

My mum and dad are really different. Mum reckons they will help me with the costs and everything like that, but my dad is like, 'Nah, you're on your own'... because when he was young he had to pay \$80 board a week, like, that was how it went...so he is more old fashioned, but then at other times, he is like, 'Nah, don't worry about it'.

Conflicting parental attitudes and values around supporting university studies versus earlier entry into the workforce, or earlier self reliance, appear in six of the girls' stories. The parents know their children need education to be able to fulfil their career ambitions, but they also want them to be independent and self-reliant at a young age (not after years of university education), as they themselves had been. Other research illustrates that family values, attitudes and beliefs influence aspirations or participation in education in rural contexts (Abbott-Chapman 2001; Alloway et al.,

2004a; James et al., 1999; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002; Kilpatrick et al., 2002), in particular, a parental preference for, and a prioritisation of, work over education (Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002). This has been associated with many other factors such as parents not wanting their children to leave home at an early age (Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002) and young people themselves expressing some anxiety about the financial and emotional costs of leaving home (see Abbott-Chapman & Kilpatrick, 2001; Alloway et al., 2004a; Alston & Kent, 2003; Apostol & Bilden, 1991; James et al., 1999), which are concerns that are arguably transmitted through the parents to begin with. In this study, factors such as leaving home for higher education and the associated ‘costs’ and the value placed on ‘earning’, have not impacted on the girls’ aspirations for higher education. However, it may later impact on the girls’ eventual decision-making or their capacity to fulfil these aspirations.

The role of the older sister in influencing the girls’ choice of college and/or creating a college attending tradition is also an influential one. Five girls out of seven who had older sisters wanted to follow their older sister’s college pathway. Beth expressed aspirations for an apprenticeship over college despite having an older sister who attended college, who withdrew during Year 11, and Ella was actually aspiring for college because her older sisters had not attended. Bettie (2002) reports a similar finding, in the American context, regarding the influence of older siblings, especially sisters, on college aspirations or decision-making. The influence in Bettie’s (2002) study is related to the transmission of knowledge from sibling to sibling about what different colleges offer and how to navigate educational institutions; which may be considered a cultural and a navigational capacity (see also Appadurai, 2004; Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010; Smith, 2011).

In this study the girls do not make this connection themselves and the personal stories do not contain any references to this. The girls aspire to college and plan to attend college largely because ‘*it has always been*’ and for most of them with older sisters who attended college, the idea that ‘*it has always been*’ is strongly reinforced. Many of the girls in this study also have a certain level of familiarity with the college institutions and an understanding of how they operate, as they are exposed to this through their older siblings and their high schools. It is important to note that along

with the sister influence, college choice is also associated with the degree of rurality. For example, some of the girls commented that they are opting for a particular college as there is no other choice or it is easier, in terms of access.

In this study, the new framing of the college pathway in recent years as both necessary and normal in the Cradle Coast region, along with newly forming expectations, values and traditions from within the girls' family worlds, appears to be a strong driving factor behind their plans for college. An awareness of the need for an educational qualification to ensure the fulfilment of career aspirations, however, appears to be the most powerful motivating factor behind the girls' college aspirations and plans. This appears to be related to their awareness of "the changing world of work and the inescapability of further education and training" (Alloway et al., 2004a, p. 120) in a rapidly changing world that contains risk and uncertainties (see Abbott-Chapman, 2000; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) which may arguably be counteracted by having further opportunities through education.

Most of the girls in this study not only need a college qualification to be able to pursue their career aspirations, but they also need a university level qualification. Nine of the girls in this study, for example, are considering careers that require a minimum tertiary level qualification. Decisions to attend university therefore also have a lot to do with needing the qualification to fulfil career aspirations.

For example, when asked where the idea to go to university came from, Grace (Grade 10) states, *Well, I thought that the career I choose probably will need a uni qualification.* Additionally, when talking about her college subjects, Cleo (Grade 10) thoughtfully adds towards the end of the conversation, *After Grade 12 I reckon I'll go to uni to get a better chance of getting a job, as a journalist...*

Grace and Cleo's university aspirations and plans are strongly related to needing the qualification to fulfil their career aspirations, which is also voiced by most of the girls in this study who are considering careers requiring a tertiary qualification. Some of the girls did not communicate this in the same way as Cleo and Grace did; however, it is clear they perceived university as necessary. For example, Lucy explains during a conversation about further education that she is not very excited about study but needs

to do it to be able to fulfil her aspiration to become a social worker and concludes with, *you don't just get things given to you*. LJ's perception of further education is similar to Lucy's, with comments such as, *once you've got that piece of paper you're right or it's gotta be done*.

It is important to note, however, the high level of uncertainty surrounding these career aspirations. Despite nearly all of the girls having career aspirations requiring a tertiary qualification, plans to complete tertiary studies are extremely fragile for more than half of them. On one hand, the girls' uncertainties about what career option is the right one for them appears to be the reason behind the fragile nature of university plans. On the other hand, however, it appears that the fragile likelihood of study is driving the girls' uncertainties around the career pathway they really want to engage with. The uncertainties around study are typically associated with factors such as securing the right grades and pre-requisites but they are also fuelled by emotional desires to remain close to home. The uncertainties appear to be connected more with a lack of confidence and less with the girls having unrealistic educational goals. As a result of these uncertainties, some girls have long lists of possible career options and have considered 'backup plans' or options that do not require a tertiary education in the mix with those careers that did.

Seven of the girls in this study have considered at least four alternative career options to their most preferred option. Some of the girls are keeping their options open and contemplating various careers purely because they do not know what they want to pursue as a career. Five of the girls express that they do not know what career they will pursue from their list of aspirations. The girls' long lists of career aspirations include at least one career that does not require a tertiary education; which seems to serve them as a backup plan in the event that something stands in the way of them entering into their chosen field such as securing the necessary grades. Research in Australia by Bok (2010) also illustrates that adolescents have backup plans in place in cases where their 'ideal' or 'dream' career aspiration may need to be compromised. For the girls in this study, the career aspirations that appear as backup plans may be a reflection of their compromised 'ideals' but they are also typically traditional and gendered occupations that allow them to remain close to home.

The listing of a number of possible occupational pathways in this study could be seen as a strategy for maximising options; however, it is linked more so to the uncertainties the girls have. These uncertainties centre mostly on not knowing what the best choice of career is for them and this typically generated considerable anxiety as they believed that by this time in their lives they ‘should know’. Sanders and Munford (2008) report a similar finding regarding how uncertainties created anxiety for some of the girls, who at between the ages of 10 and 12 years thought that they should know what they wanted for a job but didn’t. On considering both the findings from this study and Sanders and Munford (2008), it appears that uncertainties surrounding career aspirations create anxieties for some girls from early adolescence right through their high school years. In this study for some of the girls these anxieties were heightened because of additional uncertainties around securing good enough grades to be able to enter into university and having the emotional and psychological capacity to leave home. The girls’ career uncertainties and the associated anxiety are then further enhanced due to rurality.

The girls with the longest lists of possible career options in this study are the ones who are considering a gap year. The gap year is a strategy for six of the girls in this study to relieve tensions and buy them decision-making time. With seven of the girls in this study considering a number of different career options, it is not a surprise that this created tensions for some of them regarding decision-making around what college subjects to enrol in. One example of this is from the following response Lauren (Grade 10) gives when asked if she needs to make a decision at the moment on what career to pursue:

I don’t think I need to but I don’t want to get to Riverside [college] and end up taking the wrong classes. So if I end up wanting to be a doctor then I have to take certain pre-requisites before I can do that. And I don’t want to take legal studies if I don’t end up wanting to be a lawyer and that kind of thing...

Several of the girls, like Lauren, were basing their subject choices around what pre-tertiaries they thought they need for entry into a particular university course. This became more complicated for girls who were considering so many different career possibilities. Five of the girls who are uncertain talk about enrolling in as many pre-

tertiary subjects as they can in Year 11, with three of the five already studying a Year 11 maths. Regardless of career pathway uncertainty, nine of the girls talk about maths, science and/or English as necessary subjects. This is interpreted as possibly a means of covering all bases and keeping their options open; the girls do not, however, use this terminology.

The findings in this study demonstrate that there is an understanding amongst most of the girls in this study that education is important and necessary as it will create opportunities for them or allow them to fulfil their career aspirations; but some of the girls have doubts about their capacity to fulfil all of these aspirations. For example, when the girls are asked if they could see any possible barriers in the way of their fulfilling their aspirations, seven girls thought that their marks could potentially hold them back from fulfilling their university and career aspirations. Some of the girls talk about other barriers such as not having the money and how leaving home or the family to study may be hard for them to do emotionally, which is a finding reported in other Australian research (e.g. Alloway & Dalley-Trim, 2009; (see Abbott-Chapman & Kilpatrick, 2001; Alloway et al., 2004a; Alston & Kent, 2003; Apostol & Bilden, 1991; James et al., 1999). In this study the girls are more worried about leaving family and friends and their current lifestyle than they are not having the economic capital.

Seven of the girls in this study refer to wanting to have their own business and connect this with at least one of their other career aspirations. The girls' business aspirations, however, are not necessarily attached to a career that requires a tertiary level education. LJ talks about wanting to run the family farm one day and have her own veterinary clinic; Lauren would like her own law firm; Beth wants to one day have her own restaurant; Bianca mentions the idea of having her own beauty salon; Ella says she has considered setting up an animal shelter; Cleo talks quite early on about her own card-making or art-related business; and Ave, who is already in business, communicates that this is something that she has also considered for her future. The girls' shared aspirations for owning their own business and the various language used suggests that there is an underlying desire for control or flexibility. The reasoning and underlying motivations behind this aspiration are largely related to the girls' desires to do their *'own thing'* and be *'their own boss'*.

Exposure to certain career possibilities, particularly within the family and school worlds, plays a significant role in shaping the girls' career and/or tertiary study aspirations. An example of how certain experiences and understanding shape career aspirations comes from Lauren:

I guess I've always wanted to be a lawyer but I've been interested in radiography at the moment, just because I've spent a lot of time around them lately from my own experience...I've been around them a lot because I've had ankle, shoulder, wrist injuries, everything. And, I went on a medicine health camp that was run by the uni a few weeks ago and that was really good and one of the main sessions that I liked was the one on radiography. It was really good.

Lauren's recent exposure to the work of radiographers through her own injuries and through a school camp has led her to add the occupation to her list of aspirations. At other times, Lauren talks about how her early childhood aspirations of becoming a lawyer or a doctor stem from an uncle's encouragement of acquiring a law degree and the experience of spending a lot of time in hospitals with her younger brother who had a medical condition. All the girls in this study have stories like Lauren's that show how various experiences have shaped their career aspirations, particularly those experiences within the family and school worlds. LJ, for example, often talks about how her experience of growing up on a farm has influenced her love of animals and desire to help them. She talks about being exposed to the work that veterinarians do and being inspired by such work. Her aspirations to one day own her parents' farm and run a business on site are shaped by seeing her father do so and wanting to hold on to tradition. These experiences have shaped LJ's future ambitions so much so that her early childhood career aspirations of becoming a vet and running the family farm, still remain today. One of LJ's backup plans, to be a physiotherapist, also stems from her older sister's aspiration for the occupation and from her overall sporting experiences in the broader community world.

As is the case with college aspirations, certain individuals within the girls' family, school, community and peer worlds play an influential role in shaping the girls' career and/or tertiary study aspirations. Mention of sisters, mothers and other female family members or role models as having influenced career and/or university aspirations

dominate discussions. For example, Ave relates wanting to be a paediatric nurse like her godmother and connects this with an experience of being injured as a child and helped by her godmother. Rose's aspirations to become a police officer are based purely on the fact that her older sister is one, and she connects her teacher aspiration with wanting to be like Mrs Harris who teaches at her school.

The female role model influence on career aspirations is consistent across stories. The female influence, particularly that of sisters, on university aspirations also comes out across the stories of those girls with older sisters. This is most evident in the following personal story from Lucy (who has four older sisters), in response to a question around where the idea to go to university came from:

I don't know. I think it's because all my sisters are, well, Chelsea, Jess and Amelia they went to uni to be nurses. And Sonia's going back there to become a vet. So, because they're there and I know how much they've gained by doing it. It's just made me really want to do it.

When combined with other factors, the role modelling of certain females has an even greater influence on career and educational aspirations. For example, Ave is aspiring to follow her godmother's footsteps and become a paediatric nurse, but this aspiration is also shaped by her experiences growing up in Africa and exposure to the impacts of poverty on children. Lucy's aspirations for university stem from more than the role modelling of her sisters, with numerous factors combining to influence such as her desires *to make a difference, be the change you want to see in the world and help others to help themselves*, which stem from her experiences with the local Rotary club and attending a national conference on poverty.

In conclusion, the girls' educational and career aspirations are interconnected with many of their other aspirations, including those for success, happiness, independence and balance. Further education for most of the girls in this study is seen as a way to increase the probability of securing a career they enjoy or are passionate about, a career that pays 'good enough' wages for them to be self-reliant, and/or a career that enables them to balance their other aspirations, some of which may be seen in the following sections of this chapter.

The Globetrotter

All of the girls in this study have aspirations to travel and for most of the girls these are interconnected with other future goals such as a gap year, humanitarian aid work and/or careers. Aspirations to travel around the world and to travel to Africa more specifically appear across five of the girls' stories.

Frequent references are made in the girls' travel conversations to wanting to 'see' what is out there and 'experience something different', including 'different cultures' and 'how people live'. Ave's (Grade 10) story surrounding where she got the idea to travel from is only one example of how travel aspirations are related to wanting to experience and see:

Um, moving is a big issue for me and now that I am unsettled and not home, well, I consider Africa home and, like, coming here I had no idea what to expect, like purple grass or you know, so far-fetched. And so I arrive here and there's like no gates and like no electricity, like electric fences and it's so different and I think that I just want to experience different cultures and see how people live everywhere else and it's such a big world and like you know, I don't want to pass away not knowing different cultures and being able to experience different things...

Ave talks about wanting to 'experience' and 'see' in relation to travel and with some of the girls this terminology also crosses over into gap year and humanitarian aid work conversations. Wanting to 'experience' and 'see' is related to personal growth and gaining a better understanding of themselves as a person. The girls do not use this terminology or any language that may be seen to be connected with desires for self-discovery when talking about formal education or schooling. This suggests that the girls in this study are looking outside of the realms of formal education at options that allow them to grow as a person or learn different things.

If formal education or the school setting itself are not typically viewed by the girls as something that allows for experience, exploration and growth, this may then impact on post Year 10 educational decision-making. The girls' desires for self discovery appear across the majority of stories, particularly those surrounding travel, the gap year and aid work, but also in stories about aspirations for the armed forces.

This raises some questions about how this perception may influence participation in higher education at a time when young girls are in the process of negotiating various identities and interested in discovering who they are and who they want to be. The girls in this study perceive pathways outside of the formal educational setting as enabling them to engage in further self-discovery. Rose, for example, talks about *going away, figuring myself out and coming back a different person*, through moving away and joining the army. Grace, on the other hand, connects travel with enabling her time for growth and discovery but, more importantly, valuable career decision-making time, or as she says, *to see what's out there and think about what I want to do*. Many of the other girls refer to wanting to 'get out there' or see 'the big wide world' and this is typically during conversations about their travel aspirations.

As travel is interconnected with gap year aspirations, however, it is difficult to pinpoint across the girls' stories if travel is a means of buying time for career decision-making, or whether it appears that way because of how it overlaps at times with the gap year aspiration.

Some of the girls in this study are also planning for careers that enable them to travel and/or experience something different. This is another example of the interconnections between future goals and possibly a strategy for maximising options and balancing all aspirations. For example, when asked what she liked about the idea of being a chef, Beth (Grade 10) replies, *I just like cooking and I thought it would be a good job because you can travel and stuff...*

Additionally, Ella connects her defence force aspirations with travel, stating that it is *definitely a good opportunity to travel the world*. Ella further connects her aspirations for *adventurous stuff* and *wanting to get out there* with the army suggesting that many of her aspirations are interconnected.

Like Ella, five other girls make specific references to how they want, or have considered, a career that will enable travel. Most of the girls in this study have aspirations to 'experience' and 'see', which they believe they can fulfil through travel, taking a gap year and/or humanitarian aid work. Humanitarian aid work and taking a gap year appear alongside travel aspirations, possibly as these typically include travel.

In this study, it is also apparent that the girls' travel aspirations are shaped by their exposure to the possibilities through experience and the influence of female role models, in particular sisters and mothers. One example of the influence of the family world, or exposure to the possibilities through a family experience, comes from Taylor when asked about all the things that she wants to do in the future:

I'll be going to France. I'm also going to the Harry Potter Theme Park in Orlando. Yep, I'm gonna travel. In Grade 6 we travelled around Australia and that was the first time I'd ever gone out of the state and it's just, I want to travel, that's just the one thing that I want to do, just travel.

As the example shows, Taylor's travel aspirations stem from a direct experience of travel with her family. Similar may be said for Bianca and Rose, who were exposed to the idea of travel through their mothers. When it isn't mothers who are influencing travel aspirations, it is typically older sisters, which may be seen in LJ's comment, *travelling came from my sister because she went away with two friends and went around the mainland* and also in the following from Lucy:

I think because my sisters have travelled and I think it's one of those things that you can only do it up to a certain age, like I think if you travel between like 18 and 30 it's like all the fun with new experiences and that type of thing. I'd like to go on a tour or something like that, or go on an exchange. Um, we had an exchange student last year. And, my sisters Chelsea and Jodi. Jodi went on an exchange to Norway and Sweden and Chelsea went to Germany.

The above from LJ and Lucy are both in response to a question about where they got the idea to travel from. Despite these family world influences on travel plans, it is important to note that these aspirations stem from the interactions between numerous factors within the girls' cultural worlds more broadly. These interactions are illustrated through the portraits in Chapter Four that describe the girls' lives and aspirations in the broader context.

On analysis of the girls' personal stories, travel aspirations for at least six of the girls in this study are likely to interrupt their educational and/or career plans. On the other hand, two of the girls are adamant they will secure the tertiary education required for

a career that enables them to travel rather than take time off school to travel. The girls' underlying desires for success, happiness, independence and balance appear to be interwoven with their aspirations for travel, which overlap with aspirations for taking a gap year and those for aid work. For example, some of the girls associate wanting to '*see*' and '*experience*' through travel with self discovery, which may be attached to wanting independence and maturity as well as happiness and success. Some of the girls' ideas surrounding successful careers that enable travel are also connected to their ideas around the importance of achieving happiness and a balanced life.

The Good Samaritan

Wanting to help is a shared theme that runs across all but two of the girls' stories. Six of the girls talk about careers that are related to helping others and an additional three of the girls talk about careers that are related to helping animals. When talking about their aspirations for careers that involve helping, the girls in this study use language such as wanting to '*give back*' or wanting '*to help*' or '*give*'. The understandings and values around '*giving back*' that have formed from within the girls' cultural worlds shape their aspirations for the helping careers. Beth, for example, explains that her backup career aspirations to work in a nursing home or with people with a disability are because she *wants to give back to the community*, which is further reinforced by the fact that her mother and other significant females in her life work in these occupations.

Many of the other girls express similar desires to Beth regarding wanting to give and/or help, and in most cases the inspiration typically stems from a significant female/s from within their cultural world. Rose, who is contemplating several different careers and uncertain about what career is right for her, makes an interesting connection between all of her career aspirations near the conclusion of our second interview. Rose associates her career aspirations with wanting to give as she sees these as '*big things*' that are expected of her:

I see myself as, oh, I don't know. Maybe if I do, like, the whole sociology and psychologist thing and work like in a shelter or something. That's something that,

well, giving, is something that I'm really passionate about. And, well, giving, that's in the nursing, that's in the school teaching, that's in the police officering. And I think that's why I have come to those. They are big things. Like, I think that is what is expected of me. To be a big thing...

The expectation to be or do '*something big*', or '*go really far*' when it comes to careers in particular, is one that is shared across all the girls' stories. Of interest here, is that Rose perceives careers that involve helping as '*big things*'. Most of the girls connect doing '*something big*' or '*going far*' with success and/or happiness but also with achieving at a high level in terms of prestige or the amount of time commitment required to reach that particular goal. In this study, only Rose makes a specific reference to perceiving the helping careers as '*big*' or as bringing her success and happiness. Conversations around careers of passion, which the girls in this study talk about as careers that they will enjoy, however, often connect with the helping careers.

Out of all of the girls in this study, Rose is the only one who directly communicates this perception and expectation. Lauren, when talking about her aspiration to become a teacher's aide does refer to this as *a big thing because I want to give back*, but unlike Rose, she doesn't realise that she has connected the career option with '*big*' and with '*giving*'. If Rose perceives careers that involve helping as '*big things*', and Lauren does this subconsciously, this raises some questions around whether any of the other girls' visions of success include giving, helping and/or caring or whether significant others' visions of success include these things.

If so, this suggests a process of the internalisation of gendered expectations. In conversations with the girls around gender expectations, however, they typically report such influences as not being significant. It therefore seems possible that these expectations are internalised so much so that the girls are not consciously aware of their influence. In addition to this, the majority of the girls in this study do not perceive gender to be a barrier to them fulfilling their aspirations either. This finding is reflective of a recent finding by Dalley-Trim (2010) who reports that the female participants in her study dismissed the influence of gender on their lives, their expectations and their aspirations. Dalley-Trim (2010), however, relates this to the emergence of individualism and neoliberal times as the young women in her study

report feelings of control over their lives more generally and place emphasis on themselves as individuals who are responsible for their destiny despite social constraints/structures.

The girls' desires to help may explain their interest in careers particularly within the health sector but also in the veterinary sciences. However, the girls in this study have aspirations for many different careers, some of which are not necessarily related to helping others or animals. Of interest will be what the majority of the girls eventually decide on for a career and if it involves helping, as this is a dominant theme across the girls' stories. Further research is needed to explore how aspirations to 'help' and 'give' play a role in the eventual educational and career decision-making of rural adolescent girls.

Also within the Good Samaritan theme, five of the girls in this study talk about aspirations for humanitarian aid work. Conversations around humanitarian aid work with four of the five girls include talk of volunteering in African orphanages, with the girls being exposed to the idea through various experiences within their cultural worlds. For some of the girls, aid work is considered an opportunity to see what we 'take for granted' and help others, both of which may be associated with desires for personal growth. One example of this comes from Ave, who when asked if she would like to talk about her aspirations mind map responds with the following:

My aspirations. So in the future, I would love to be able to go back to my country [Africa] and help orphans, like coming from a first world country it shows me how much we've got here and how much they don't have. So it would be really good if maybe I could help where I can...

Like Ave, the other girls aspiring for humanitarian aid work use language related to helping or seeing. This aspiration appears to be tied to personal growth through experience; however, it is evident that desires for humanitarian aid work are not necessarily something that take priority of order over other aspirations. For example, Ave and Lucy talk about obtaining tertiary qualifications first and the other three girls talk about wanting to pursue aid work in a more off-the-cuff manner, as if the desire is there but they haven't thought about it any real depth. Humanitarian aid work

aspirations are therefore seen to be connected to the girls' desires to 'help', 'experience' and 'see'. It is possible these desires may interrupt educational and career plans for some of the girls in this study; however, only for those who have the capacity to engage with this aspiration.

Aspirations for aid work for the five girls in this study typically stem from an experience, which may be seen in the example above with Ave. Moving to the Cradle Coast region from Africa in 2009, Ave grew up in a cultural world very different to what she lives in now. Over the course of the interviews Ave shares many personal stories about her life in South Africa and how these have influenced how she sees the world and what she wants to do with her future. Growing up and seeing others living in extreme poverty and subjected to different forms of abuse, including young children, Ave explains has shaped many of her aspirations, but more particularly the aspiration to help orphans in her country of birth. The experiences and exposure to the idea of humanitarian aid work are quite different across the girls' stories. Lucy is exposed to the idea of aid work in Africa through older female friends and explains:

A couple of friends have done it. One of my friends, she turned 19 this year and she went over to, I can't remember where it was, somewhere in Asia, and she worked in an orphanage for two months..

However, Bianca is exposed to the idea of overseas aid through her mother who is also organising for this to happen, stating, *you know how you go over to Fiji and you help them build their houses and you live there, she [mum] was setting that up for me when I finish Grade 10...*

For Lucy, helping others, whether that be as an aid worker in African orphanages or as a social worker here in Tasmania, is also connected to experiences within her cultural worlds. Exposure to the possibility of aid work through friends within her peer world no doubt influenced her aspirations to help orphans. Lucy's aspiration to become a social worker, on the other hand, she explains, is shaped by her experiences of bullying within the school world and the actions and support of the school youth worker to whom she is inspired by. The Good Samaritan title applies to Ave and Lucy

in various ways and to many of the other girls in this study. The girls' experiences shape what it is, or who it is, that they are passionate about helping.

The Gap Year

As mentioned earlier, the girls' gap year aspirations are mostly a strategy they are considering because it will buy them time for career decision-making and relieve tensions. The gap year is seen as an opportunity to work, travel and/or have a break from school. It is also viewed as something that will involve self discovery or a broader understanding of what is best for them in terms of their career. Six of the girls in this study stated that they are considering taking a break from school before going on to university, if university is what they eventually decide to do. When talking about career aspirations and the indecision surrounding these, LJ explains:

Dad has always been, like, always said that if you don't know what you want to do, just go and join the armed forces for a few years and get a feel for it and then, like, I heard how you can go there for your gap year and they pay you and stuff...

LJ's comments are reflective of the other girls' thoughts around the gap year as a strategy to buy time; however, it is also a time that some of the girls want to take to 'try' or experience. Lauren, for example, connects the gap year with allowing her time *to decide what I want to do* and *to try* being a teacher's aide. Lauren's list of possible careers is extensive and over the course of the interviews she expresses her frustration with not knowing what career she wants and the anxieties she feels regarding this. During these conversations Lauren mentions the gap year and work as a teacher's aide but she also mentions that maybe she will do secretarial work before going on to university. These, for Lauren, are backup strategies to buy her more decision-making time and relieve tensions. These are not options that her parents would like her take, something which brings additional pressure to her decision-making process.

It appears that Lauren also sees the gap year as an opportunity to engage in further self discovery in the sense that it will enable her the time to learn more about the person she is and the person that she wants to be. Lauren is thinking that she will discover if she is capable of being a teacher's aide or suited to this career through the actual practical experience in the position. Although Lauren does not know what

career pathway to follow, like many of the girls she is clear on what she doesn't want. For instance, when talking about her future, Lauren often uses terminology such as, '*I don't want to be that person*', '*that's not gonna be me*', '*I don't want to be them*', '*I don't want to be one of them people*' and '*I don't want to be that sort of person*'. During the course of the interviews, Lauren therefore clearly communicates what she does not want to be like. What is not so clear to Lauren, though, is what pathway she does want and this appears to be what is behind her gap year aspiration.

LJ comes across as a little more relaxed about the uncertainties she has regarding her future career and about the possibility of taking a gap year. Some of this may stem from the fact that LJ's older sister has taken three gap years and is still undecided on a career, but is currently contemplating university studies. Despite exposure to and acceptance of the gap year option within her family world, LJ does, however, have some reservations about it and hopes her preferred career pathways are the reality. For all the girls in this study who are contemplating a gap year, it is apparent that the reasoning behind it is strongly related to uncertainties about what future career path to take, as is the case with Lauren and LJ. For Rose, the gap year is also viewed as an opportunity for freedom and less worries, as may be seen in her response to a question about why the gap year appealed to her:

Um, I don't know, maybe, like, the whole school thing and then, like, having a period of time of not having to worry about it. Not having to worry about anything, not being expected to do anything, that whole being free thing. And then coming back, yeah. That's how I see a gap year. Or two. Yeah. For you.

The other girls talk more about the gap year in terms of buying them more time to think and discover their passion, whereas Rose talks about it more in terms of having a rest or a break away from managing all the pressures of her many commitments. In many ways the underlying motivations behind taking a gap year are linked to buying time for self-discovery.

Research that explores the gap year is beginning to emerge in the literature and demonstrates that in the UK context, young people are opting to take time off prior to university because of 'the economy of experience' that has been associated with the

gap year; and the perceptions that the gap year enables for a greater chance of success at university or ‘an edge’ over others in terms of securing employment (see Brown, 2011; Heath, 2007; King, 2011). The analysis illustrates that the girls in this study do not perceive the gap year as an option that enables for ‘an edge’ or greater success at university, however, it does demonstrate that they perceive the gap year as enabling them to ‘experience’.

The findings in this study are consistent with those of King (2011) that illustrate the gap year as a time for young people to engage in ‘identity work’. In this study, ‘identity work’ is seen as “an attempt to form and project a true and enduring self” (Hemmings, 2006, p. 133) which is a complex ‘psychocultural’ process (Hemmings, 2000, 2006; Hoffman, 1998). The girls’ desires for further self-discovery through fulfilling aspirations outside the formal educational context are connected with wanting more time to engage in ‘identity work’. This may involve not only learning more about themselves as a person and what they want in life, but also gaining greater independence and maturity through ‘experience’ (see King, 2011; O’Shea, 2011; Stehlik, 2010).

The above section of the chapter illustrates how the girls have many shared aspirations for their early adulthood lives. It further demonstrates that these aspirations are interconnected with underlying aspirations for happiness, success, independence and balance which are also fuelled by desires such as those for opportunity, fulfilment, self-reliance, discovery and growth. The chapter so far elucidates how the girls’ aspirations are shaped by many factors in their cultural worlds, particularly within the family world and school world. The following section elaborates on the girls other shared aspirations and the experiences that shape these.

The girls’ shared goals for later in their lives

Marriage, motherhood and ‘a nice house’

This section discusses how shared early to middle adulthood aspirations for marriage, motherhood and ‘a nice house’ emerged across the personal stories collected from the adolescent girls. The early to middle adulthood years include the mid to late 20s and

early 30s. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, shared aspirations are those that appear in the majority of the personal stories collected from the girls in this study. For example, all of the girls, except for one, have marriage/relationship goals, nine of the girls have aspirations for motherhood and eight of the girls have aspirations for home ownership – with the majority expressing that they hoped to fulfil these aspirations later in life.

The findings in this study show that the girls' have aspirations to '*settle down*' following the fulfilment of other aspirations such as completing their education, establishing their careers and travelling. '*Settling down*' for eight of the girls means marriage, motherhood and '*a nice house*', all of which they envision will happen during their mid to late 20s or early 30s. For Bianca, the term '*settling down*' refers to a relationship only; for Cleo, '*settling down*' does not include having '*a nice house*', but it does include marriage and children; and for LJ, '*settling down*' means one day owning the family farm, but does not include visions for marriage or motherhood.

All of the girls in this study, except for one, perceive their immediate family to be the most important thing in their current lives. This appears to be linked to the emotional and psychological supports they receive from their family. The majority of the girls talk about their future hopes for relationships, marriage, children and/or houses as goals they desire for happiness and fulfilment but these are also linked to desires to live comfortably and feel secure.

The girls do not talk extensively about their aspirations for later in life. They are much more concerned with discussing goals for the near future, possibly as '*settling down*' is a vision they hold for approximately 10 years down the track and therefore not necessarily of immediate concern to them. In saying this, some of the girls had pinpointed specific timeframes such as what age they anticipated marriage and children. For example, some had mapped out how they would fulfil travel and various other aspirations prior to starting their own families and when this would occur.

The girls' early to middle adulthood visions for marriage, children and having nice houses appear to stem from underlying desires for happiness, fulfilment, security and comfort. For those girls who expressed aspirations for motherhood, these also appear

to be connected to underlying desires to ‘give’ or ‘share’. The findings around shared early to middle adulthood aspirations and how these are planned for later in life are discussed below. Also included in the following discussion are how aspects of culture such as traditions, expectations, values, norms and understandings influence the girls’ marriage and motherhood goals.

‘Settling down’

All of the girls in this study, except for LJ, have relationship/marriage plans and these are typically envisioned for their mid to late 20s or early 30s. It is important to note that the girls generally talk about relationships prior to this time as ‘friendships’ and do not choose to devote time to these conversations. From these 10 girls who expressed relationship plans, eight also had aspirations for motherhood.

The terminology the girls use around marriage or relationships later in life is varied. Despite these variations the language does suggest that these aspirations are connected to basic desires for happiness, comfort and companionship and the idea that relationships are important. For example, when some of the girls mention marriage or relationships, they talk about ‘having someone’, which may be seen in the following conversation with Bianca around what she wanted to do after Grade 12, but before she turns 30:

After Grade 12 I want to travel and start a career and by the time I am 30 I want to settle down with someone. [Settle down?] I suppose not settle down completely because I wouldn’t be able to. But just like have someone, but have my career and be able to travel but just have someone to live with, kind of thing.

In other conversations with Bianca she talks about needing to be around others and her fears of being alone, which also suggest that companionship is a motivating factor. Some of the other girls talk about wanting relationships for similar reasons. Alternatively, some of the girls talk about wanting a relationship because they think it will make them happy, which may be seen in the following from Lucy:

Well, this might sound really gay but my sister, well she's happy and you can tell that she's in love and I want that, I want what she has...Yeah, in the future I would like to be where she is.

Desires for happiness through a relationship also appear across some of the other girls' stories. Additionally, the girls' beliefs that relationships are important may be behind their reasoning behind the aspiration, which may be seen in the following comment from Grace:

I would like to get married and have kids and stuff but it is not my goal in life... probably not so much the kids thing, but the relationship thing. I mean for everyone I guess that's important.

None of the girls is able to elaborate on why they believe a relationship will make them happy or why they believe relationships are important, but it appears this belief stems from what they have seen within their own family worlds and the value that they place on family. For example, some of the girls talk about their own parent's relationship or their older sister's or brother's relationships and wanting a similar experience themselves. Lucy's response above is one example of how role models within the family influence relationship aspirations. Furthermore, eight of the girls in this study report that they highly value family and name family as the most important thing in their lives. It appears that relationships are seen by many of the girls as being the first step towards having a family later in life and that the value stems from within their own family world.

Eight of the 10 girls who have plans for marriage or relationships also have plans for motherhood. The terminology the girls use around motherhood later in life suggests that this aspiration is connected to desires to 'give' or share their own lived experiences or, as Ave would say, 'pass down the traditions'. One example of desires to share experiences comes from the following conversation with Lucy, which stems from a question about the prioritisation of her life aspirations:

I think I put starting a family last because I would need to do all these things before I settle down and have a family. So then I could tell them about travelling and living

overseas and what it was like to go to uni and what Year 11 and 12 was like and things like that [smiling and laughing].

Lucy's response above shows how she sees her own experiences and the completion of her aspirations as enabling her to have something to share, or 'to tell' her children one day. This suggests an underlying motivation to achieve other goals first so that you have a story to tell or knowledge to pass on to your children. Or in Ave's case, have family traditions to pass on. Creating and passing on norms, knowledge and traditions may therefore be one of the many different reasons for motherhood aspirations, which may also be interconnected with desires for giving, sharing, nurturing, happiness and fulfilment.

On the other hand, some of the girls simply state that they 'like kids' and this is behind their desires for motherhood, which may be seen from the following response from Beth regarding her plans for children, *I've always liked kids and stuff and always wanted to have kids of my own and always thought, yeah, get married.* Beth's liking for children stems from her family world and during interviews she often talks about babysitting her nephew. Beth had also created a photographic collage of him in her artefact book, which I believe she did to enable her to talk more about him. The majority of the girls communicate their marriage and motherhood aspirations through their artefact books and these aspirations are interconnected mostly to the ideas they have about happiness. These ideas are arguably formed within their cultural worlds.

Apart from Ella, who wants to one day meet a hot guy, be in the army and one day get married on a beach in Hawaii and have a boy and a girl, most of the girls don't discuss in any detail their visions for marriage and motherhood; however, they have constructed clear timeframes. These timeframes are sometimes constructed specifically around the completion of their education and travel plans and the establishment of their chosen careers. For example, when asked when she thought she might start a family, Lucy responded with the following:

Um, I think I'll be about 26 when I have my first child. It's a pretty specific number. So, five years' uni. So if I go straight to uni after college, that's 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 so then three years to do all this [points to travel on her artefact]. I'd really like to do

the exchange or orphanage thing so I'll give that a year. So, that's 24 and then if I live overseas for two years then when I come back I'll be 26.

There are also responses from the girls around their aspirations for motherhood and marriage that do not include any explanation of how these goals fitted in after education and careers, but they are just simply planned for later in their lives. This may be seen in the following from Taylor when talking generally about her future goals:

Um, originally I was going to get married at about 33, have kids at 35 and then I decided no, I don't want to be an old mum. So I want to get married, oh, I don't know, about 28 or 29 and then have kids early 30s, yep, so have a family...

Cleo is the only girl in this study who is open to the idea of changing the order of her career, marriage and motherhood aspirations around, depending on circumstances.

None of the girls in this study talk about trying to achieve marriage, motherhood and careers at the same time and certainly not in the near future. They seem to think that some sort of order needs to happen or that one will have to be sacrificed for the other. In this study, all of the girls, with the exception of Cleo, have no intentions to have children or marry prior to the fulfilment of their schooling aspirations or establishing their careers; with many also hoping to travel and accomplish other goals in life prior to 'settling down'.

It appears that these timeframes and the girls' planning around marriage and motherhood may be connected to parental expectations, particularly maternal expectations. The girls in this study do not communicate that maternal expectations are an influence on their aspirations for marriage and motherhood; however, this expectation is voiced in most of the conversations with the mothers. For example, seven of the nine mothers in this study relate that they hope their daughters will complete their other goals in life prior to 'settling down' or getting married and/or having children. The later plans for marriage and motherhood may also be related to the value that the girls have placed on security through 'a good job' and 'having enough money' prior to having children.

The majority of the girls in this study also have aspirations for home ownership, with most seeing this as a possibility following schooling and the establishment of careers. Conversations around having ‘a nice house’ generally appear when discussing what the girls hope to achieve by the time they are 30 years old. This may be seen in the following from Rose, when talking about plans after Grade 12 but prior to turning 30:

Um, after Grade 12, I want to have a gap year. And travel. Or two. If I had the money by then. I want to definitely have a car. And I want to look at a house, like putting money into an account by then...um, for a house.

Having ‘a nice house’ is also sometimes discussed by the girls in conjunction with or alongside marriage and/or motherhood, or mentioned in discussions about ‘the good life’. Home ownership is also in some cases mentioned on its own. The following from Lucy is one example of how wanting a house is talked about in the same sentence as aspirations for marriage and ‘the good life’, or in this case the perfect life. This comes from part of a conversation with Lucy about the influence of her older sister on her aspirations:

When I look at her life [oldest sister], I look at it and see that it is probably the closest it can be to perfect. Like even though she’s got problems, she works, she’s got a house, she’s got a boyfriend, she knows she is going to marry him, she’s been to uni, she’s travelled, yeah, I think that’s the perfect life.”

None of the girls in this study articulate exactly why they are aspiring for home ownership, apart from Ave and Rose. The words these two girls use when talking about having their own home are ‘security’ and ‘comfort’. Even though the other girls in this study do not use the same terminology as Ave and Rose, it appears that living comfortably is at least one reason behind the aspiration for ‘a nice house’. Happiness also appears to be a reason behind the aspiration for owning a home. This is because the topic of home ownership appears most often in conversations about ‘the good life’ with which many of the girls associate with being comfortable, being able to do what they want to do and being happy.

In this study, aspirations for marriage, motherhood and ‘a nice house’ all appear to be connected to happiness, security and comfort and stem from values surrounding

family, independence and self-reliance. The girls' aspirations for their mid 20s and early 30s also appear to be connected to their culturally shaped ideas about health and happiness – or as Appadurai (2004) would say, their visions of 'the good life'. The girls' aspirations for 'the good life' are discussed briefly below.

'The good life'

When it comes to the girls' perceptions of 'the good life' there are some shared understandings and visions about what this may include and what such a life would look like for them. In the majority of the girls' responses to a question about 'the good life', there are mostly references to happiness and being able to do what you want to do or afford to do what you want to do. In conjunction with this are references to having family and friends and living a comfortable life. When asked what she believed 'the good life' is, for example, Lucy responds with the following:

Well, stereotypically it would mean a really rich person with all these fancy cars and they've got all the money in the world to throw around but then realistically they're probably not that happy and I think the good life is like when you have a good family and good friends and you've got what you wanted in life but not too much of it. Because if you've got too much money you'll just throw it around. I think it's the people in your life that matter more than what you have in your life...I don't know. Just be with family and doing what I want, yeah...Yeah, I would have travelled. I would have gone to uni and worked for a few years. Then travelled and come back and started a family. And like bought a house and still have a really tight bond with my sisters.

Six of the girls, including Lucy, refer to happiness as a core component of their ideas about living the good life. Happiness is often associated with fulfilment, as in enjoyment of life generally or having a rewarding career or enough money. Happiness is further connected to being around family or friends and with balancing all aspirations and having fun.

The girls typically use terminology that may be linked with happiness, fulfilment, comfort and security when talking about the good life. This terminology is often linked in with having family, having a home and having a rewarding career. It is also

linked to underlying desires for balance and being able to do what you want to do. This may be seen in the following from Grace:

I want to be able to have a balance. Work my arse off and get where I want to go and then I want to also be able to have fun and spend time with my friends. So I want to be able to balance that. I think if I was living the good life I would be able to go out and work hard at whatever my job is or my career but I also want to be able to stop and take a bit of time...

Ave also talks in a similar way to Grace regarding wanting to have fun or some time for herself but with more of an emphasis on being comfortable and having no stresses, which may be seen below:

I sort of look at it as living comfortably. So a nice house and a good kitchen and something you can call home... um, sort of to have no worries...I sort of want to have a life that I can get by but still have a good time. And I sort of don't want to get too involved in work so I still have time to do things...

This theme of balance and fun is also something that runs across the majority of the other girls' stories. References to being able to do what they want to do, however, are also made by many of the girls, with the following from Bianca reflecting much of what the other girls see in their own visions of living the good life:

Probably just being able to do what I want to do. Not necessarily being rich but being able to afford what I want in life. Like having a good enough job to support myself and that kind of thing. Just, like, not being restricted as much.

Four of the girls actually voice that if they were living the good life, they would have fulfilled their early adulthood aspirations. This suggests that these four girls see the fulfilment of those earlier goals as something that sets them up for living 'the good life'. The girls may therefore see 'the good life' as something that is achieved much later in their lives when they have fulfilled education, career, travel and lifestyle aspirations and are on the verge of fulfilling the aspirations they have for marriage, motherhood and 'a nice house'.

Based on the analysis of the girls' personal stories, it appears that they all have culturally shaped visions of the good life that include the fulfilment of goals surrounding happiness which are linked to having a family and a home. For some of the girls, these visions include the fulfilment of their early adulthood aspirations around schooling, careers and travel. It appears that the girls in this study do not see themselves currently living 'the good life', which may be because it is associated more so with '*settling down*' and viewed as something that is achieved later in life. There may also be a connection here between the girls' perceptions and maternal expectations, as the majority of mothers in this study voice that they hope their daughters will fulfil all their other goals in life prior to '*settling down*'.

The above findings about the girls' shared aspirations for later in their lives demonstrate that the majority hope to settle down sometime in their mid-to-late 20s to early 30s. This is reflective of a finding by Thomson and Holland (2002) who report on adolescents having normative aspirations to 'settle down' prior to the age of 35 years. Some of the girls in this study, however, had carefully planned specific timeframes around this. The findings discussed in this chapter also highlight how the girls' aspirations for marriage, motherhood and home ownership are fuelled by underlying desires, for happiness, comfort and security. How these aspirations are shaped by the girls' ideas about what 'the good life' includes is also apparent. A recent study by Bok (2010) also explored adolescent understandings of 'the good life' and illustrates that, although diverse in nature, these consisted of shared visions for success and happiness, owning certain goods and services and having a good job. The findings from this study are consistent with Bok's (2010) finding; however, the girls do not include references to desires for goods or services. What is apparent, however, is this shared understanding that 'the good life' is having and doing what you want to do but not in excess. Lucy's comments, mentioned earlier and again below, best illustrate the shared understanding held by the majority of the girls in this study:

I think the good life is when you have a good family and good friends and you've got what you wanted in life but not too much of it.

The girls in this study see the good life as having what they want – but this doesn't necessarily mean having a lot of money or material possessions. The differences

between this study and Bok's (2010) may be associated with the age of the participants, as the cohort in Bok's study are younger. Further shared findings regarding key messages from the school principals and the mothers in this study are presented below.

Adult perspectives

Key messages from the school principals

There are some key messages that stem from the interviews with the school principals. One of the principals is a school business manager; however, he is referred to as a school principal in the following section. Key messages include those that appear in at least four out of the seven interviews. For example, the influence of parental expectations, values, traditional pathways, access to college, the influence of the school and the incentives to work rather than study, appear in at least four of the interviews with principals.

In conversations about participation in education and training in the region, there are two interwoven key messages that appear most often across the interviews. The first is the school-to-work tradition and the value placed on pathways into the workforce. The value of 'earning' rather than 'formal learning' and the fact that many parents in the region completed a Grade 10 and/or trade qualification rather than having any experience of tertiary studies is a key message from the principals in this study. One example of this value comes from a school principal during a conversation where he is describing the wider community:

I'd say that a fairly common theme amongst all of that would be parents' view of education generally – in that I don't believe they regard it highly enough. And the indicators that we have here around student attendance would sort of substantiate that. If there's something important to do like shopping, or a trip to Brickwood, it's okay to pull the kids out of school for the day and do that...

The under-valuing of education features in all discussions with the school principals; however, most also communicate that there are 'pockets' of families within their communities that do value education. The expectation parents have for their children

in most cases, however, is that their children follow the traditional pathway and not aspire to careers that require a tertiary qualification. This may be seen in the following conversation with the same school principal:

I think we've got a country-type view that university isn't a thing that kids do and the aspirations of parents for their kids would be more around getting a job, probably locally on the farm or maybe in timber or something like that.

This expectation (often referred to in this study as parental aspiration) is communicated by all of the other school principals, who believe parents or the wider community have an expectation/aspiration for their children to remain close to home and/or work locally. This may also be seen in the following response from another school principal when discussing the influence of wider community on aspirations:

There is an aspiration of staying in a town and being with your family, meeting a miner and maybe finding a bit of work, maybe starting a family and that kind of stuff. Real tensions are there. We have a couple of girls every year that seem to choose that path.

Four of the school principals also mention the value placed on the trades in this region and the fact that 'good money' can be earned – sometimes straight out of high school, which suggests that this adds to the complexities of educational and workforce decision-making in the region, as it reinforces another long-standing value of early self-sufficiency. For example, one of the principals explains the following when talking about school transitions:

You know, lots of kids get out and they can go and earn \$40, 000 year when they're 16...a common perspective [in the community] is that Grade 11 and 12 is a waste of time, that is unless you're going to uni...why not get out and earn some money...

Another example of how 'good money' may be a more appealing option than completing college may also be seen in the following comments from another school principal, who also understands himself that this is perhaps a worthwhile option to entertain or encourage:

We've got a couple every year [students] who go up to Gilchrist [college] and who maybe spend a bit of time up at Gilchrist and then come back or they just break off education and go across [to the mine]. They might put on 12 trainees a year. So 12 trainees a year on \$75,000 a year [pauses] not bad for a trainee... I'm trying to get my daughter to...

Another principal mentions how *the kids don't see the deferred gratification* and how access to college and/or university is complicated by distance and cost, whereas entry into the workforce is not. The majority of the principals talk about how workforce participation is valued more than participation in education and the typical pathway for students in this region from a range of schools is from Grade 10 (or midway through Year 11) into a job, an apprenticeship or a traineeship. This value and the associated pathway is perhaps reinforced by the instant gratification through earning 'good money'. The traditional pathway may be seen in the following response from one of the principals regarding a question asking what most students do following Year 10 studies:

Not a lot of them [students] go on to Year 11 and 12. So, a lot of them go into apprenticeships, traineeships and a lot of them go into work.

This particular principal connects some of this with access to education being made more difficult through distance and cost as well as parents not recognising the potential in their children or valuing education, which is a key message across four other principal interviews.

All of the principals relate that they believe that teachers and school experiences are powerful influences on students. They talk about this in terms of exposure to the possibilities and encouragement to aim for higher education or for non-traditional pathways. In saying this, however, most of them believe that at the end of the day, the family is typically a more powerful force despite what the school can do. The following conversation about the influence of teacher expectations and encouragement is one example of this perception that the family overrides what the school can do:

Yeah. They are influential [teacher expectations]. I mean, we obviously push our kids in the most challenging direction for them that we think they're capable of, extending their capabilities. But, then you weigh that up against family expectations and if there's a big difference between those two, which one's going to win out?

Another message is that the current system in Tasmania is set up in a way that encourages the perception that high school ends at Grade 10 not Grade 12. This is voiced by three of the principals as a structural concern that reinforces the school-to-work and trade culture. It is included because two other principals imply this is an issue, but do not make a direct reference to it. Only one of the principals specifically refers to the transport logistics of continuing on to college and 'the tyranny of distance' as impacting on the transition to Year 11. This is arguably because the transport/distance barriers to college and university education may not have concerned them as much as the cultural factors.

Many other messages, aside from those presented above as shared messages, such as expectations, values and traditional pathways that steer young people in this region away from college and tertiary education, stem from the interviews with the school principals. Some of these messages feature in the girls' life history portraits, as they form part of the contextual and background material.

Key messages from the mothers

There are also some key messages that stem from the interviews with the girls' mothers. Key messages include those that appear in at least five out of the nine interviews. More often than not, these key messages appear in at least seven and sometimes eight of the conversations with the mothers. These shared key messages are typically around expectations and aspirations; however, they are also around barriers and supports.

'Whatever she wants to do' and 'whatever will make her happy' are the two shared responses from eight out of the nine mothers in this study in answer to the question, "What are your hopes for your daughter's future?". It is evident that the mothers apply these hopes to all aspects of their daughter's futures; however, these statements are typically followed by conversations that focus on school and work.

In eight of nine cases, the mother's hopes for their daughters' futures match their daughters' educational and career goals. It is important to note here that the mothers are never asked what their daughter's aspirations are; however, in nearly every interview they naturally state what they believe their daughter's school and work aspirations are when talking about their hopes for their daughters' future.

For example, in answer to the above question around hopes for her daughter, LJ's mother responds with, *I guess just to fulfil what she wants to do and she wants to be a vet...* and in response to the same question, Beth's mother says, *Um, become a chef hopefully – I know that is what she really wants to do...* Lauren's mother responds similarly to this question; however, her emphasis is much more on happiness, which may be seen below:

Whatever she's happy to do. And obviously she'll go to Riverside [college], she'll go to uni and she will be, my guess is, one of three things, either a lawyer, a paediatrician or a teacher...because that's what she tells us...Whatever she wants, as long as she's happy. There's no point being there if she's not going to be liking it...

These are only three examples that have been used to highlight how the majority of mothers hope that their daughters will be happy and do what it is they want to do. Another shared theme that runs across the material collected from the majority of the mothers is that they all hope their daughters are happy in their jobs or careers. This may be seen above in the response from Lauren's mother and also below, from Lucy's mum:

Well I hope she does what she wants to do and whatever job she does that she's happy in. 'Cause if you're not happy in a job there's no point in being there...

The mothers' hopes for their daughters to be happy in their careers appears to be connected to the belief that if they are happy in their working life, then they will be happy in life overall. One example to highlight what most of the mothers believe comes from Taylor's mother below when elaborating on why she wants her daughter to secure a job that will make her happy:

As for what she wants to do, I don't know... as long as she's happy and she does what she wants to do, because there's nothing worse than getting into a job that you don't like, it's not going to make your life very good. You're going to end up sick because there's stress about it and hate it...you know, depression and all that. You've got to be happy in what you do.

The mothers' hopes for their daughters to be happy in their careers also appears to stem from their own experiences in the majority of situations. For example, in discussions with six of the mothers, they communicate that they do not want for their daughters the career experience they have had themselves. The below response from Lauren's mother highlights this theme:

Me personally, I would have dreamed to have either been a midwife, or to have gone in to child care. And I did neither. But different circumstances, you know. Lauren will have the help of us to help her get where she needs to be and times were different 20 odd years ago...I went to be a checkout chick and then a wife and then a mother. So for me, I don't want her to do that. And she wouldn't be happy...

From these six mothers, five talk about how there are more opportunities today than when they were younger and that they want their daughters to take advantage of these opportunities. Ave's mother in particular shares an in-depth story of her own life experiences and the hardships of being raised in Africa with a mother who adopted many abused and abandoned children:

I came from a family of five girls. My dad worked for the roads department, he tarred roads, that was his position. And my mum stayed at home because she had so many children. So we never had the opportunity to go to university. We just had to make do with whatever we could do once we left school...and so we've never had that opportunity...

There seems to be an underlying realisation amongst the mothers in this study that education and work are needed and that also, these need to be prioritised above other aspirations – especially relationships and motherhood. This is communicated by all of the mothers in this study and it appears that this belief also stems from their own

experiences. This may be seen in the following example from Bianca's mum when talking about her hopes for her daughter:

We have spoken a lot in the past about how I had gone to uni with her as a five year old under my arm and how I hoped for her to finish her education before she settles down. You know, travel the world, get married, do everything, but get your education first. I think it becomes, well, life is easier if you have a career to fall back on.

The mothers in this study all want their daughters to have the opportunity to experience many different things, including having relationships and children. The timelines the mothers have in mind for fulfilment of relationship and motherhood aspirations, however, are standard in that not one of the mothers wants their daughter to have children, marry or 'settle down' prior to the fulfilment of their education, career and travel aspirations.

When asked about barriers in the way of their daughters fulfilling their aspirations, six of the girls' mothers envision that there will be no barriers in the way, due to personal attributes such as determination or tenacity. In response to a question around potential barriers, for example, Lucy's mother responds with, *Nothing will stop Lucy, if she wants to do it, she'll do it*; Grace's mum says, *Not really, she's very determined*; and Taylor's mum states *What might stop her? [Pauses] Nothing I don't reckon, if she really wants to do it, she'll do it... most definitely.*

In terms of other influences on their daughters lives, the mothers' responses are all varied. What is most often commented on, however, are their daughters' experiences within the family and school worlds. This may be seen below with LJ's mum in response to what she believed may have influenced what her daughter wants for the future:

Since she was really little she's always wanted to be a vet. And I guess it's just because we're on a farm and always been around animals. That's all I can say, yeah, because I've never really pushed it, it's been her decision. So I guess it is just because we're involved with animals and whatever...and she used to go to Greenhills High School and of course they used to do Ag stuff up there with animals and bits and

pieces... So perhaps that was the start of it. Yeah. I don't know. Country school and out doing country things maybe as well. Yeah.

A similar picture is painted with the following response from Grace's mum to the same question (with one of Grace's aspirations being to work with horses as a trainer or chiropractor):

Well, very much with the horses because we live on land and our neighbours are really horsey and they've always been really great with Grace and really generous with their time and helped her with that and they're the ones that have the horse chiropractor come...

Also mentioned most often as an influence is the provision of family support, which is sometimes combined with personal attributes, as a factor that will help the girls to fulfil their ambitions. For example, Ave's mum believes that herself and her husband are her daughter's greatest source of support but finishes the sentence with the following:

But she's got the tenacity of a bulldog [laughs]. She just doesn't stop. If she wants something she will just keep going and she will get it. And I encourage that because that is what you need to get anywhere. You need that tenacity. You need to be able to keep going. And I don't think that anything will stand in her way. If she wants that, she will go ahead and get it.

The mothers in this study all envision that their daughters will follow on with whatever career aspiration they had talked with them about. For those mothers whose daughters have more than one career aspiration, they are confident that their daughters will act on at least one of them. The belief that their girls have many options and will be good at whatever they chose to do, is also held by the majority of mothers.

When asked about their own influence on their daughters' lives, the majority of mothers in this study say that they hope they had influenced through support and encouragement. The teaching of values and ways of living life, however, also appear as maternal influences. The mothers therefore see their influence as encouragement and support but it is apparent from general conversation that they also shape their

daughters' values and overall perspectives or approaches to living life. Some of these include, '*work hard*', '*pack it in*', '*find your truth*' and '*do your best*'. Other shared maternal beliefs include the high importance of family and being happy, satisfied and fulfilled through doing whatever it is that you want to do. The mothers also value making the most of opportunities available and doing as many things as you can in life.

Despite the value placed on family, all mothers want their daughters to fulfil all their other aspirations prior to those for marriage and motherhood with careers of passion and job satisfaction highly regarded and encouraged. On exploring the match between maternal expectations and the girls' actual aspirations, it also appears that the mothers have these expectations because their daughters have told them that is what they want to do. It is therefore difficult to determine whether maternal expectations have influenced the girls' aspirations or the other way around.

From the above, it is evident that the mothers in this study hold shared hopes for their daughters' futures that centre on them securing happiness within themselves through a fulfilling career of passion and through doing what they want. They also see the possibilities and options for their daughters as being greater than those available to them at that age and hope that their daughters embrace these. An analysis of the mothers' values and perspectives also shows that some of these match those of their daughters, suggesting that worldviews may be transmitted from mother to daughter. The mothers' perspectives and hopes for their daughters' futures may also be seen in greater context in the girls' stories in Chapter Four.

Multiple goals and desires for 'identity work'

Perceptions of how to achieve 'balance' and 'personal growth'

This chapter demonstrates that the girls have shared aspirations and these include graduating from college and university, engaging in careers that involve helping and careers of passion, owning their own business and travelling the world. It illustrates that six of the girls also aspire for a gap year and five for humanitarian aid work. The

chapter further shows that the majority of the girls in this study have visions for later in their lives that include marriage, motherhood and owning '*a nice house*'.

The thematic analysis demonstrates that these 'surface level' aspirations are interconnected with underlying aspirations including those for happiness, success, independence and balance. These themselves are interwoven with the girls other underlying aspirations for opportunity, self-reliance, fulfilment, control, flexibility, contribution, growth, discovery, security and comfort. The girls' underlying aspirations were identified as themes in this study and have largely been drawn from the language that they use. This chapter highlights that rural girls have multiple aspirations, and that understanding aspirations is more complex than simply looking at what is on the surface. There are many interconnections and the balancing and prioritising of aspirations influences the girls' eventual decision-making, especially around school and work.

Two examples of how understanding multiple goals and the interconnections between these may impact on educational and career decision-making come from Ave and Ella. Ave's aspiration to help orphans is connected to her aspiration to become a paediatric nurse and her aspirations to travel to South Africa. Her aspiration to help orphans in Africa is also connected to her aspiration to adopt a child. Additionally, Ave has a *heart for missions* and hopes to donate and raise money for charities which are connected with her aspirations to 'give' and 'help' others. Her travel aspirations are interconnected with her career aspiration to become a paediatric nurse and with wanting to *help* and *see*. On further exploring the interconnections between all of Ave's aspirations this brought out her *passion for children* and how this drives her career and study goals. Exploring Ave's multiple future goals, including the interconnections and the underlying motivational factors, also revealed that her desires to balance or achieve all aspirations may impact on her eventual school and work decision-making.

Ella's aspiration for the armed forces is connected to her travel aspiration and her adventure aspirations, including the opportunity to drive tanks, use guns and surf in Hawaii. She also sees herself fulfilling several other goals through joining the armed forces, not just those connected to travel and adventure. For instance, Ella sees the

army as enabling her to find a boyfriend, to have *an army style wedding* and as a way of gaining respect and prestige. Her aspiration to graduate from college is also interconnected with other future goals, such as wanting to leave the isolated town she currently lives in, meet new people and have new opportunities. On further exploring the interconnections for Ella, this brought out her desires to *move forward* and *get out there*. She sees this being achieved through first completing college and then through a career in the armed forces. Graduating from college and joining the armed forces are how Ella envisions she can fulfil her many future goals, including those for success, happiness, independence and balance.

These examples from Ave and Ella illustrate some of the interconnections between many future goals, and how having multiple goals may influence educational and career decision-making. They reflect a shared finding in this study that rural girls have many aspirations and that these are interconnected with underlying desires. Existing research with female college students and with women shows that many have aspirations for work, relationships and children and that these are influenced by a range of factors, including socio-demographic factors, family background factors and circumstances (see Johnson & Lee, 2009; Hoffnung, 2004; Harris, 2002; Warner-Smith & Lee, 2001). Research with adolescents also shows they have many aspirations in life and there are a range of influencing factors (e.g. Brown, 2011; Pocock, 2005; Thomson & Holland, 2002).

What the above-mentioned research demonstrates is that factors such as personal circumstances, family background, socioeconomic status or social class, gender and rurality have a significant impact on aspirations. What the above-mentioned research does not explore, is how aspirations are interconnected, including underlying affective aspirations, and how having multiple goals influences educational and career decision-making.

This study contributes new insights by illustrating how rural girls' life aspirations, including those for school, work, travel, relationships, motherhood, and lifestyle, relate to their underlying affective aspirations. It demonstrates that the girls' desires to balance all of these may impact on their career and study decision-making. Most of the girls in this study are aspiring for higher education because they perceive it as

'needed' to secure opportunities for greater self-reliance and fulfilment. They are aspiring for higher education as they believe it will secure them happiness through careers they are passionate about and careers that allow them to make a contribution through *'helping'* or *'giving back'*. The girls are opting for careers that they believe will enable them to travel, which further allows them to *'get out there'*, *'experience'*, *'see'* and therefore grow and discover. These aspirations are further connected with desires for success and balance, which are interwoven with many other aspirations.

Another key finding in this chapter is that the girls are still in the process of constructing their identities, and this is impacting on their school and work decision-making. Many of the girls are exploring ways to buy them more time for self-discovery and personal growth. They need this time as they are uncertain about the pathway they want to engage with the most, and what they are best suited to. The findings suggest that college and university are seen as a way to achieve what the girls see they *'need'* to secure their *'most hoped for'* career aspirations. In their minds, this should eventually bring them happiness and fulfilment.

On the other hand, the findings suggest that non-school related aspirations are seen by the girls as a way of being able to *'see'*, *'experience'* and *'get out there'* and to a certain extent, *'live in the moment'*. This terminology suggests underlying desires for self-discovery and growth. The girls use this language in conversations about travel, taking a gap year, joining the armed forces and/or volunteering for humanitarian aid work. The girls do not use this language in conversations about higher education. This suggests that they may not see school as a platform for exploration and growth. As the girls in this study do not necessarily see self-discovery as something that can be achieved through formal education, further schooling may not be prioritised at this time in their lives.

It is possible that the girls' desires for self-discovery and personal growth may steer them away from the higher education pathway, as in their minds, formal educational spaces may not offer this particular opportunity. The girls do not appear to see university as enabling them to have what they desire the most at this moment in time, which is to *'see'*, *'experience'*, *'learn'* and *'discover'* things about themselves and the *'big wide world'*. The girls may also prioritise fulfilling the underlying beliefs they

have before any other ‘concrete’ aspiration that they have, such as those for higher education. For instance, if you do not go to university, can you still *‘have enough money, but not too much’*, *‘have a good job’*, *‘have a career that you love’*, *‘do something big’*, *‘go far in life’*, *‘keep moving forward’*, *‘do what means a lot to you’*, *‘work hard’*, *‘pay your own way’* and *‘stand on your own two feet’*? Can you still make some kind of contribution, find fulfilment, be self-reliant, be comfortable, be secure, be successful and be happy if you don’t participate in higher education? The girls’ most heart-felt underlying beliefs, such as those mentioned above, may actually be fulfilled without tertiary education. When this is combined with their strong desires for engaging in further ‘identity work’ (Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998), at this moment in time, this may impact on their higher education decision-making.

This section of the chapter has illustrated two key insights regarding the girls’ perceptions of higher education that stem from the data collected in this study. It shows that the girls have desires to fulfil multiple aspirations, including underlying affective aspirations, and they do not necessarily perceive this balance being achieved through higher education. The above section demonstrates that the girls do not perceive their desires for ‘identity work’ being fulfilled through higher education either. Insights that are directly relevant to responding to the research question are discussed in the following chapter.

6. Why culture matters

“In one form or another, culture engulfs our lives, our desires, our frustrations, our ambitions, and the freedoms that we seek.” (Sen, 2004, p. 39)

Cultural worlds shape aspirations

Multiple experiences shape ‘the self’, ‘cultural capacities’ and aspirations

The previous two chapters of this thesis demonstrate that the girls in this study have multiple aspirations in life, including those for education, careers, travel, relationships, motherhood and lifestyle and these are interconnected with their underlying affective aspirations. Some of these aspirations are ‘shared’ as they appear across the majority of the personal stories collected (see Chapter Five). Some of these aspirations, however, are unique to each of the girls or only appear as ‘common’ aspirations for three or four girls (see Chapter Four).

The girls’ ‘shared’ surface level aspirations include those for college; higher education; careers of passion (stimulating careers related to special interests); owning a business; careers that involve helping; travel; motherhood; marriage; and home ownership. Aspirations for humanitarian aid work also appear across five of the girls’ stories and aspirations for taking a gap year appear across six stories. These are important to include here as they are often interconnected with the girls’ shared aspirations for travel and/or careers that involve helping. The girls’ shared ‘surface level’ aspirations stem from their underlying affective aspirations, which in this study, were identified through a thematic analysis (see Chapter Three). The underlying affective aspirations include those for ‘happiness’, ‘success’, ‘independence’, ‘balance’, ‘opportunity’, ‘self-reliance’, ‘control’, ‘flexibility’, ‘fulfilment’, ‘contribution’, ‘recognition’, ‘growth’, ‘discovery’, ‘security’ and ‘comfort’.

A broader range of ‘surface level’ aspirations also appear in the personal stories and artefacts collected from the girls but these are not shared by the majority. Some of

these are highlighted in their life histories. These include many different lifestyle and short-term or immediate goals such as learning another language; obtaining a licence to learn to drive; having a holiday with friends; saving money; doing well in exams; buying a car; visiting relatives; securing part-time work; reaching a high level in a chosen sport; caring for parents; meeting new people and travelling extensively. In addition, key ideas that appear in some of the personal stories and artefacts collected are desires to ‘live in the moment’, ‘be different’, ‘do something different’ and ‘go away and come back again’. These are interconnected with the girls’ underlying aspirations for happiness, recognition, personal growth and self-discovery.

The aim of this thesis is to respond to the question, “How are the aspirations of adolescent girls in the Cradle Coast region shaped by their cultural worlds?” This question is guided largely by the emerging recognition of the role of culture in shaping aspirations. The life history portraits and shared findings chapters therefore highlight the economic, social and cultural experiences that shape the girls’ aspirations. These experiences include those within the girls’ cultural worlds, such as traditions, norms, expectations, values, beliefs and understandings. The impact of exposure to the possibilities and the role modelling and encouragement of females in the girls’ family and school worlds are also notably significant. In addition to this, Chapter Four and Chapter Five provide insights into the types of cultural and intergenerational ‘resources’ that the girls have, which may impact on their capacity to fulfil certain aspirations.

The findings from this study show that cultural worlds shape aspirations in two main ways. Firstly, they impact on aspects of ‘the self’, particularly worldview and identity (see Appadurai, 2004; Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998; Phelan et al., 1991). And, secondly, they impact on overall experiences and the knowledge or skills that these produce, or ‘cultural capacities’ (see Appadurai, 2004; Bourdieu, 1973; Phelan et al., 1991). The first kind of impact shapes the girls’ understandings of what is possible to begin with, what is valuable in life and what they can identify with as valuable aspirations. The second kind of impact shapes the girls’ capacity to successfully navigate particular social settings (their ‘cultural capacity’). Their ‘cultural capacity’ may then influence whether or not they have the necessary cultural ‘resources’ to act on all of their aspirations. The section below discusses how cultural worlds shape

aspects of ‘the self’ and how this in turn shapes aspirations. This is followed by a discussion on how ‘cultural capacities’ are formed and how these impact on the capacity to fulfil aspirations.

Cultural worlds shape ‘the self’

Culturally shaped worldviews and aspirations

The analysis of the girls’ personal stories and their life history portraits illustrate that they have many aspirations and these are shaped by multiple experiences within their cultural worlds. One of the ways in which cultural worlds’ shape the girls aspirations is through the impact they have on their worldviews. The coding of the girls’ stories and artefacts allowed for an understanding of their worldviews through highlighting overall perspectives and beliefs about life. This process elucidated how these beliefs were connected with the girls’ underlying affective aspirations and how these then shaped their ‘surface level’ aspirations for education, careers, travel, relationships, motherhood and lifestyle.

The girls’ underlying aspirations for happiness, success, independence and balance are what shape all of their ‘surface level’ goals. All of the girls’ shared ‘surface level’ aspirations, for example, are reflective of what they believe will bring them happiness, success, independence and balance in life. In this study, this is seen by the girls as being accomplished through ‘becoming’ a Graduate, a Globetrotter and a Good Samaritan, as well as through marriage, motherhood and buying a ‘nice house’. The girls see themselves living ‘a good life’ if they achieve all of these aspirations; including those attached to their culturally shaped ideas about what happiness is, what success is, what it means to be independent and what it means to have balance (see Appadurai, 2004). These ideas and understandings are further interconnected with the girls’ other underlying affective aspirations for opportunity, self-reliance, control, flexibility, personal fulfilment, growth, discovery, security, comfort and wanting to make a contribution and receive recognition.

The analysis indicated that the girls’ aspirations for education and careers are mainly related to those for opportunity, self-reliance, fulfilment, control, flexibility, and wanting to make a contribution and be recognised. The beliefs that are connected to

these aspirations are culturally shaped understandings about what is important in life – their worldviews. In terms of aspirations for college and higher education these are firstly shaped by the girls’ understandings that fulfilling these goals will ensure they *‘have what they need’*. They believe that you need education because *‘you don’t just get things given to you’* and because it is necessary if you want to *‘do what means a lot to you’*. For the girls, education is a way to ensure they *‘have a good job’*, *‘have a career they love’*, *‘have enough money’* and it means that they are able *‘to stand on their own two feet’* and *‘pay their own way’*. The girls also believe education is important as it will enable them to secure a career that allows them *‘to do something big’*, *‘be different’*, *‘go far in life’* and *‘keep moving forward’* as it provides them with options and opportunities. Without education, the girls relate that they understand they may be *‘stuck’* in a *‘basic job’* that they believe will not be stimulating or of interest. The *‘basic jobs’* the girls talk about are occupations that are traditional for females in their hometowns.

In this study, the girls’ understanding of *‘doing something big’* are also connected with careers that involve helping and giving. When the girls talk about careers, for example, it is evident these are guided by their beliefs that it is important to *‘help’*, *‘give back’*, *‘make a difference’*, *‘help those who can’t help themselves’* or *‘play some small part in something’*. Aspirations for owning their own business stem from the girls’ understanding that it is important to *‘do your own thing’* or *‘be your own boss’*. The girls also express a shared belief that *‘you need to be seen’* or *‘you need to do something different’* and this is associated with wanting to please others, feel rewarded and gain recognition through following a particular career path. These beliefs about what is important in life shape the girls’ educational and career aspirations.

The girls’ aspirations for travel, which were often interconnected with those for taking a gap year and humanitarian aid work, are related more so to self-discovery, growth and wanting to make a contribution. These aspirations are firstly shaped by their beliefs including, *‘you should do many things’* and remember that *‘there is a big wide world’* so it is important to *‘experience’*, *‘learn’* and *‘see’*. Travel aspirations that are connected with aid work are further shaped by beliefs such as it’s important to *‘make a difference’* and *‘help’*. These may all be achieved, in their minds, if you *‘get out*

there', or if you *'go away and come back again'* which means leaving their current known world. The girls' beliefs about experiencing, learning and seeing are therefore what shape their underlying affective aspirations for self-discovery, growth and contribution, which then in turn shape their 'surface level' aspirations for travel, humanitarian aid work and taking a gap year.

In terms of the girls' aspirations for marriage, motherhood and 'a nice house', these stem mainly from their underlying affective aspirations for security and comfort. These affective aspirations are shaped firstly by a high value on family and the belief that it is important to *'have someone'*, *'not be alone'*, *'pass down traditions'*, *'share your experiences'*, *'live comfortably'* and be *'secure'*. These worldviews about having someone, sharing experiences and living comfortably shape the girls' desires for security and comfort, which then in turn shape their 'surface level' aspirations for marriage, motherhood and 'a nice house'.

Further to this, in the girls' overall worldviews they also hold philosophical beliefs about 'the possibilities' such as *'the sky's the limit'*, *'aim for the moon because if you miss, you will land amongst the stars'* and *'be the change you want to see in the world'*. These understandings are arguably what guide their multiple aspirations as they believe that anything and all things are possible.

How these worldviews are shaped and transmitted

The findings in this study illustrate how experiences and understandings that are learned from within the community, family and school worlds have the most significant impact on the girls' worldviews. More specifically, the analysis, suggests a connection between the worldviews of the mothers and the daughters and a connection between the worldviews of significant individuals in the school world and the girls.

The analysis demonstrated that despite some differences in terminology, the mothers have similar worldviews to that of their daughters regarding what is important in life. This suggests that the girls' beliefs and worldviews have been transmitted through their mothers. Most notably, maternal beliefs such as it is important to *'fulfil what you want to do'* *'work hard'*, *'pack it in'*, *'find your truth/passion'*, *'do your best'*, *'do*

what you want to do, *'make the most of opportunities'* and *'do many things'*. The mothers also believe that *'anything is possible'*. These understandings are what largely shape the girls' 'high' educational and occupational aspirations.

The idea that *'anything is possible'* is also transmitted through the school principals and favourite teachers within the school world. This is largely in circumstances where one of the girls shows potential or ability in a particular area. This school-generated worldview is also connected with the expectation and encouragement to *'aim high'*. This is most evident from the conversations with the school principals but also appears in the girls' life history portraits in Chapter Four.

The girls in this study believe that their aspirations are 'realities' or goals that are achievable despite any structural, cultural or other barriers – if they work hard enough. This means that the girls believe they will achieve their aspirations and suggests no aspiration-expectation gap despite the fact they are older than the typical 'compromise stage' of 14 years old (see Gottfredson, 1981, 2002). Gottfredson (1981) argues, for example, that adolescents by this time typically compromise their aspirations based on their understandings of their abilities, interests and the potential structural barriers to achieving these aspirations. Other research supports the finding that adolescents make these compromises or 'know their limits' at around this age (e.g. Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Armstrong and Crombie, 2000; Gottfredson, 2002). This suggests that in this study, the worldview that *'anything is possible'* has a significant impact on the 'aspiration-expectation' gap that has been reported in other studies. The impact of this worldview is that there is no gap and the girls' aspirations and expectations are therefore one in the same at this current time in their lives (the majority of the girls in this study are 15 and 16 years of age).

The majority of the girls believe that attributes such as determination, hard work and/or stubbornness will ensure successful fulfilment of their aspirations. The girls also communicate that they see gender as creating no barriers to their fulfilling their aspirations. This reflects an element of individualism within the girls, which was also recently reported by Dalley-Trim (2012) from an Australian study with an adolescent cohort. Other studies have shown that adolescents may blame themselves if they are 'not good enough' to achieve what they hoped most for (e.g. Archer & Yamashita, 2003). These existing studies illustrate that adolescents may place more emphasis on

themselves as the deciding factor when it comes to successfully accomplishing their goals. The findings in this study support this existing research as the girls believe that *'anything is possible'*, especially *'if you try hard enough for it'*, *'knuckle down'*, are *'persistent'* and *'work hard'*.

The majority of the girls' mothers also believe that their daughters face no barriers to achieving their goals and that personal attributes, such as those mentioned by the girls above, will enable them to achieve what they want in life. This finding illustrates a possible transmission, from mother to daughter, of the belief that societal barriers may be overcome through individual determinants. This may be seen as optimistic thinking or confidence that is transferred through the mother, however the analysis suggests that it is more likely to be a culturally transmitted belief that *'anything is possible if you work hard enough for it'*. This is arguably the belief that informs the girls' multiple aspirations in life.

In this study, the girls' shared 'concrete aspirations' include graduating from college and university; working in careers they are passionate about and that involve helping; owning their own business; travelling; taking a gap year; volunteering for humanitarian aid work; getting married; having children; and owning their own homes. These 'concrete aspirations' are arguably projections of what the girls are familiar with, what they have been exposed to through their school, family, peer and community worlds or what they have been told they must have to ensure happiness, success and fulfilment. For example, the particular career type, travel destinations, gap year activities and options for aid work all stem largely from experiences within their family or school worlds. The girls attach a particular picture of happiness, for example, to what it is they know or can identify with or what they understand to be valuable. The specific 'surface level' aspirations that are attached to these worldviews are those that the girls have been exposed to in their school and family worlds.

Constructing possible identities and future selves from 'what is seen and known'

In this study exposure to the possibilities in the girls' community, family and school worlds has a powerful influence on their aspirations. This exposure comes particularly through 'significant other' females within the family world, including their mothers, sisters, grandmothers or other female relations or close family friends. The exposure

also comes through significant females in the school world, including favourite teachers and social workers/counsellors or career pathway planners. It also comes from life experiences more generally such as what the girls regularly see and come to know and understand as normal. This means, for example, the traditional educational pathways or the particular occupations or roles that they see as available in their local contexts. These are what the girls are able to identify with and what they then picture themselves as potentially 'becoming'. All of the girls describe how their aspirations have in some way been inspired by seeing their sisters and/or other females accomplish these aspirations or hearing about it in the school and family world. They connect knowing about a particular occupation, humanitarian aid work, volunteer activities and certain travel destinations, for example, through seeing or hearing about it from others within their cultural worlds.

In this study, the role of the older sister in influencing the girls' life aspirations is significant. This is well illustrated in Rose, LJ and Lucy's life histories in particular. The influence of other females within the girls' family worlds, such as mothers, grandmothers or cousins, is also significant and most illustrated in Bianca, Lauren, Cleo, Beth and Ave's life history portraits. In the school environment, the role model influence of female teachers, career planners and/or social workers or counsellors impacts significantly, which may be seen particularly in the life histories of Lucy, Ella, Rose and Grace. Other significant females from within the girls' community worlds, including close family friends who they talk to about their aspirations, are also influential. This influence is well illustrated in LJ, Taylor, Lucy, Rose and Beth's portraits in Chapter Four. When all of the above-mentioned significant females in the girls' lives are not acting as role models, they appear to be key players that the girls talk with about the possibilities they are contemplating.

It was not unusual for the girls' own college and/or career aspirations to closely mirror that of their sisters or another significant female in their lives. Other research has reported on this intergenerational influence or the influence of female role models, including mothers and female friends and relatives (e.g. Bettie, 2002; Brooks, 2004; Dumais, 2002; Furlong, 1986; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman, 2002). The role modelling of females plays an important part not only when it comes to the career and educational aspirations of the girls in this study, but also their travel aspirations and

other aspirations such as those surrounding a gap year or humanitarian aid work. Some examples of how other females influence the girls' life aspirations are therefore briefly discussed to illustrate these findings.

Lucy has no qualms about university studies and becoming a social worker as she has four older sisters who have continued on to tertiary level education and most of the females in her family are in the helping careers. She has also been exposed to the ideas of aid work and travel through her sisters and female friends. Ave can identify with becoming a nurse as she has close relationships with her grandmother and her godmother who were both nurses. Her ideas about becoming a nurse to help orphans also come from her direct experiences in South Africa where she spent the first thirteen years of her life. Another of Ave's grandmothers was a foster carer for abused and neglected children in South Africa, which also highlights how underlying affective aspirations to 'help' are shaped by the experiences of those the girls know.

Cleo wants to *'be like mum'* and this is regarding everything that she admires about her, including the fact that her mother is *'a strong, independent woman who is very successful'*. Although Bianca hesitates to admit it, she too wants to be like her mother who she calls a 'gypsy' because she has travelled widely and continues to want to do so. The exposure can also work in reverse as it does with both Lauren and LJ, who do not want the career life or early marriage and children that their mothers have had. In the cases of LJ and Lauren, however, their mothers clearly do not want this for their daughters either as they want them to have opportunities through education. In fact, none of the mothers in this study indicated that they wanted their daughters to marry and have children early in their lives or make the career choices that they had.

In most cases the girls relate that either their mother, sister or other close female family members or friends have been most influential when it comes to all of their aspirations. It is important to note that for Ave, Grace, Cleo, Ella and LJ there is a connection with their fathers that becomes evident in the analysis regarding admiration. LJ is the only one, however, who communicates that she wishes for the kind of work life that her father has. She explains that this is because he is good at a range of tasks, enjoys what he does and has variety in his work days. Some of the other girls express great pride in their fathers that they relate to diversity in their skills and their knowledge. The five girls mentioned above clearly look up to their fathers

and have a great deal of respect for them. The fathers also seem to be a source of good fun. It is the mothers, however, that appear most often in conversations about educational pathway planning. This suggests the level of involvement in educational planning is different between mothers and fathers. For example, Rose, Ave, Lauren, LJ, Grace, Bianca, Lucy and Taylor relate that their mothers are heavily involved in educational and career planning and encourage them to embrace the opportunities that this will provide them.

Other exposure to the possibilities occurs through the girls' experiences in the wider community, school and family worlds. Lucy and Taylor's experiences below are two examples that illustrate how community worlds shape aspirations. Lucy has desires to '*help others to help themselves*' and '*make a difference*' as a result of her experiences with the local rotary club and attending a conference on reducing poverty. These desires in turn shape Lucy's aspirations for a career as a social worker and her aspirations for humanitarian aid work. Taylor's ultimate dream to travel to Paris stems from the actions of a French woman who works with her father. The woman gave her a souvenir cube with the Eiffel Tower inside and talked with her about Paris. Taylor said that prior to this experience she had heard that French people were '*horrible*' and '*stuck up*'. Taylor relates that she therefore wanted to go to Paris and '*see for herself*' and '*experience it for herself*'.

The school world also exposes the girls' to the possibilities and shapes their ideas about what they want for the future. Cleo's exposure to the idea of journalism through her teachers and the encouragement to pursue this from her school principal is one example of this influence '*to write the big stories*'. Other examples of how the school world influences the girls' ideas about their future include Rose's aspiration for humanitarian aid work that stems from a school visit by a volunteer in the community; Lauren's aspiration to become a radiologist through exposure at a health camp organised through the school; and Ella's exposure to the idea of the armed forces through army recruitment information sessions at her school.

In addition, the ideas that the girls have about their futures are shaped by their family worlds. LJ, for example, has desires to own the family farm and become a vet because of exposure to these possibilities through her own lived experiences. She communicates that she '*loves animals*' and wants to '*help animals because they can't*

help themselves'. LJ also relates that she wants to see the difference that she makes through helping a sick animal return to better health. These desires stem from her experiences growing up on a rural property and the daily exposure she has had to animals as well as seeing the vet treating them on the farm. Bianca's aspiration to '*be her own boss*' and '*do it all*', by running her own business, stems from seeing her mother operate several different businesses since she was a young child. Another example of the family world influence may be seen with Ave, who has a '*passion for children*', desires '*to help orphans*' and aspirations to become a paediatric nurse. These desires are shaped by her lived experiences growing up in South Africa and exposure to the possibilities through the role modelling of females in her family world.

How certain experiences across the realms of the community, school and family world are sometimes interconnected to shape aspirations may also be seen in the example below from Grace. Grace has aspirations for a career as a horse chiropractor and for achieving at a high level in endurance horse riding and polocrosse which all stem from her exposure to the possibilities at a neighbouring farm. These goals are also supported and encouraged in her family world. Grace makes references, for example, to her father's excitement about the horse riding and his expectation that she continues with the endurance riding and polocrosse. Her mother also hopes, encourages and expects Grace to consider one day working with animals. Further to this, Grace is aiming to achieve at a high level in cattle handling competitions, which she has been exposed to through her community and school world – with these goals also heavily supported and encouraged in her family world.

In this study, various experiences in the community, school and family world expose the girls to the possibilities to begin with and this then shapes their aspirations. Most of the influence comes in the form of exposure to the possibilities from female role models as well as discussing the options with them. The influence also stems from engaging in an activity directly or seeing it directly. There is one experience, however, or source of exposure, that is noticeably lacking. This is exposure to college and higher education through a family tradition.

The majority of the girls in this study have aspirations for higher education without exposure to it in their family worlds. This suggests that the aspiration is generated

from somewhere other than direct experience. The analysis indicates that the girls' schooling aspirations stem from an understanding that education is '*needed*'. Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2010) also recently found the rural adolescent cohort in their study associated education with '*need*' and increasing options. This suggests that young people across rural contexts possibly view education as merely a means to an end. This connection regarding the perceived need of education to secure 'a good job' is also noted by Bok (2010) in her study with year 6 and 7 students from a low socioeconomic area in a school of 160 students. This suggests that the perception of schooling as needed is not only held by rural students but also students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Other studies internationally also report a connection between education as being seen as a means to an end, with some suggesting this is due to the 'Aim Higher' policy initiatives or the influence of the school (e.g. Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Sanders and Munford, 2008). In this study, the understanding of education as being '*needed*' is one that is transmitted largely through the mothers and attached to embracing opportunity.

This section has illustrated how aspects of 'the self' including identity and worldview are first shaped by the range of experiences and understandings from within the girls' school and family worlds in particular. The girls' understandings about what is important in life shape their underlying aspirations for happiness, success, independence and balance, which are then projected into 'concrete' aspirations that the girls can identify with through exposure to these in their known worlds. This exposure typically comes through significant females in their lives that role model the possibilities to them; talk about the possibilities with them and encourage them to pursue their dreams. The question that remains is whether or not the girls have the capacity to engage with all of the aspirations that they have in life. In particular, the 'cultural capacity' that enables for certain aspirations to become realities. Possibly of interest to educational policy makers and educational practitioners, is that the findings suggest that not all of girls have the 'cultural capacity to fulfil their aspirations for higher education. This is discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Cultural worlds shape capacity

Intergenerational ‘cultural capacity’

The previous section illustrates that the girls’ cultural worlds impact on aspects of ‘the self’ including their identity and worldview and this then shapes their aspirations in life. This section of the chapter discusses another type of impact that cultural worlds have on the girls’ aspirations – their ‘cultural capacity’ to fulfil them. It discusses the girls’ ‘cultural capacity’ as an intergenerational capacity that is transmitted through the family (e.g. Bok, 2010; Smith, 2011; Winterton & Irwin, 2012). These studies suggest that family world experiences shape the various types of knowledge or ‘cultural capacity’ that adolescents may have, particularly in terms of their ability to navigate a range of social spaces, including educational institutions. These ‘cultural capacities’ have been linked to Appadurai’s (2004) ‘navigational capacity’, Bourdieu’s (1973, 1986) ideas surrounding having experience in the ‘field’ and the concepts of ‘cultural capital’ and ‘habitus’ (e.g. Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010; Smith, 2011). These ‘cultural capacities’ may also arguably be linked to Phelan et al’s (1991) ‘adaptation strategies’ which include for example the ability to adapt to the norms, expectations and values across the community, peer, school and family world.

The above-mentioned research suggests that if there is no family experience or tradition of a particular pathway (such as the higher education pathway), then the ‘cultural capacity’, ‘navigational capacity’ and ‘cultural capital’, required to successfully navigate that pathway is less likely to be possessed by the adolescent or student. Research also associates these ‘capacities’ with social class and suggest that students from working class families or low socioeconomic backgrounds have limited opportunities to build on these ‘capacities’. This then means they have less ‘cultural capacity’ to successfully navigate higher education institutions and systems than students from middle income or middle class families.

Based on the existing research on ‘intergenerational cultural capacity’, it appears that the majority of the girls in this study do not have the ‘cultural capacity’ to fulfil all of their aspirations for higher education. This is irrespective of socioeconomic status. Most of the parents of the girls in this study have not attended or completed college (i.e. years 11 and 12 of high school in the Tasmanian context), so there is typically no

maternal or paternal tradition or knowledge of this pathway. Seven of the girls have older sisters who continued on to college, however, from these, four withdrew midway during year 11. The other four girls have no sibling tradition of college attendance or completion. This suggests that for eight of the eleven girls in this study, it will be more difficult for them to navigate the college system successfully without the ‘intergenerational capacity’ that provides them with the necessary ‘cultural capital’ (class-based skills and knowledge), ‘navigational capacity’ (experience in a range of social spaces), and adaptation strategies (ability to adapt cultural understandings and knowledge to difference social spaces) to do so.

In addition to this, from all of the girls’ parents, only two mothers have university undergraduate degrees. Only one of the girls in this study, Lucy, has older sisters who continued on to university studies. Out of Lucy’s four sisters, one has successfully completed an undergraduate degree and the other three are working towards one. This suggests that only three of the girls in this study have the necessary ‘navigational capacity’, ‘cultural capital’ and ‘adaptation strategies’ required to successfully make their way through university.

As the Cradle Coast region is known for its school-to-work culture and No Higher Education Family Tradition (NOHEFT) the findings from this study regarding ‘intergenerational’ college and university experiences, and the associated capital and capacity, are not unexpected (see Gabriel & Walter, 2002; Guenther & Langworthy, 2010). This raises questions about the level of impact that teachers in rural areas have as role models and the type of influence they have on expanding horizons and offering opportunities. The findings in this study illustrate that the current ‘normal’ pathways in this region include either an apprenticeship, a traineeship or college. The principals and the girls in this study communicate, however, that from those who go on to college, a significant number withdraw midway through year 11. This suggests that a pathway from year 10 into the workforce, without securing college or equivalent level educational qualifications, is not only normal but accepted.

Guided by previous research on family experiences of tertiary education, it appears that the majority of the girls in this study do not have the type of intergenerational ‘cultural capacity’ required to successfully graduate from college, let alone that required to transition successfully to university. This means that despite having

college and university level aspirations, there is still some doubt as to whether or not all of the girls who are aiming for college and higher education will be able to adapt to these environments, identify with them (or feel they belong) and navigate them successfully (e.g. Appadurai, 2004; Archer et al., 2007; Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Bok, 2010; Bourdieu, 1973, 1986; Gale, 2010; Phelan et al., 1991; Smith, 2011; Winterton & Irwin, 2012).

The findings therefore suggest that most of the girls do not have the ‘cultural capacity’ to fulfil higher education aspirations. They further suggest that this is not purely based on socioeconomic status and that rurality is another factor that influences ‘cultural capacity’. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, and the associated small sample, broad conclusions cannot be made about how rurality shapes the girls’ ‘cultural capacity’. However, rurality does appear to impact on the kinds of ‘cultural capacity’ that may be acquired through the transmission of intergenerational family experiences of higher education. This is guided in part by previous research that illustrates the number of people with a vocational or trade qualification in the region is higher than the state and national average, but the region is considered low performing in the attainment of university level qualifications (e.g. DOTARS, 2003; Guenther & Langworthy, 2010; IRD, 2009).

This highlights an insight not yet fully explored in the literature, that young rural girls do have aspirations for higher education, but they face similar challenges to those encountered by students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, in potentially not having the intergenerational ‘cultural capacity’ to fulfil these. Future research that further explores the impacts of rurality and socioeconomic status may provide insights into their combined impact on this ‘cultural capacity’.

‘The self’ as a ‘cultural capacity’

This study illustrates that despite aspirations for higher education, the girls may not eventually act on these aspirations or fulfil them for a number of reasons. One of these reasons is connected with the girls’ intergenerational ‘cultural capacity’ which is highlighted above. Another reason that is also associated with the girls’ ‘cultural capacity’ is connected with the process of constructing and understanding ‘the self’. As discussed in Chapter Five, the majority of the girls in this study are still in the

process of understanding who they are and who they want to become. They are considering ways to buy more time for self-discovery outside of the school world and this is happening in years 9 and 10 of their secondary education. What this suggests is that the girls want more opportunities to engage in ‘identity work’, and are constructing ‘the self’, including worldviews and identities (see Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998; Phelan et al., 1991).

At this point in time, the girls in this study perceive ‘identity work’ as something that occurs outside the realms of the school world⁶. They talk about experiences that enable discovery and development of ‘the self’ in conversations about non-school-related goals. The girls’ desires for further ‘identity work’ through non-school-related aspirations such as those for travel, a career in the army, humanitarian aid work or taking a gap year, may therefore impact on whether or not they participate in higher education following the completion of college. They want to discover more about themselves and they anticipate this will be possible through fulfilling aspirations other than those for tertiary education. If the girls prioritise their desires for ‘identity work’, this may then impact on participation in higher education. This finding suggests that to increase the likelihood of participation in higher education in rural areas, it may be necessary to create further opportunities for students to engage in ‘identity work’ and discover the ‘enduring self’ prior to years 9 and 10 of secondary school.

The thesis demonstrates that the future roles the girls have envisioned for themselves, largely include those they are most familiar with, or have been exposed to, through their school and family worlds. This suggests that the girls aspire to what they know and what is normal or traditional. The findings also demonstrate that the majority of the girls are uncertain about what it is they really want. This raises questions as to whether or not they have had enough opportunities to discover who they are, what they are passionate about and what they are capable of. At this time in their lives, the girls want and need this. They want to learn more about their own passions, beliefs and capabilities and they do not see formal education settings as a place for this to occur.

⁶ This is not to say that ‘identity work’ does not occur in the school world as research demonstrates that it does.

The girls are looking to other opportunities outside of their known worlds to discover, learn, experience and see what is out there. This, in their minds, will allow them to understand who they are and what they want to do and be. If understanding ‘the self’ is a cultural process shaped by kin, peers, school and community (see Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998), it is also a ‘cultural capacity’, and in this study, it is one that is still under construction. The girls’ plan to continue this construction of ‘the self’ through fulfilling their aspirations for travel, taking a gap year, aid work or joining the army, not through fulfilling their aspirations for higher education.

Even if the girls do prioritise their higher education aspirations over those for self-discovery, it is still uncertain if they will have the necessary intergenerational ‘cultural capacity’ to fulfil these aspirations. This is largely due to having limited exposure to a range of social, cultural and educational experiences due to rurality, as well as the school-to-work culture in the region and NOHEFT (e.g. Gabriel & Walters, 2008; Guenther & Langworthy, 2010). This study illustrates how cultural worlds influence ‘what is seen and known’ and how this then shapes the girls’ aspirations in life. It further demonstrates how the girls’ experiences impact on their ‘cultural capacity’ to fulfil certain aspirations, particularly those for higher education.

7. Conclusion: Insights and implications

“What people learn or want or do or dream about is embedded in particular macro- and micro-cultural systems.” (Wolcott, 1983, p. 6)

Generating new conclusions

A window with a view on culture

The conceptual framework for this study created a platform for exploring and understanding how cultural worlds shape adolescent aspirations. It allowed the author to respond to the research question and to understand how and why culture matters. The framework enabled new insights into how the school and family worlds, in particular, shaped the girls’ worldviews and their aspirations. It allowed for an understanding of how their experiences shaped what the girls were able to identify with and what they saw as possible for their futures. Exploring cultural worlds through this framework generated new insights regarding how a range of social, cultural and economic experiences may shape the capacity to fulfil aspirations.

Research that explores the role of culture in shaping aspirations or the capacity to fulfil these has recently emerged in the literature (e.g. Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010; Prosser et al., 2008; Smith, 2011; Thompson & Holland, 2002; Winterton & Irwin, 2012). This thesis contributes to this emerging body of work by demonstrating how culture shapes aspirations through its impact on aspects of ‘the self’. It shows how culturally constructed identities and worldviews shape ‘surface level’ aspirations for education, careers, motherhood, relationships, travel and lifestyle. The study also raises questions surrounding how culture may shape the ‘capacity’ to fulfil aspirations for higher education. Guided by the literature that explores family experiences of higher education, the findings from this study suggest that aspects of culture may also impact on the intergenerational ‘cultural capacity’ that these rural adolescent girls have to fulfil their aspirations for higher education.

Through its framework and approach, this research illustrates that rural adolescent girls have multiple aspirations and these are interconnected. It also elucidates how multiple influencing factors impact on adolescent life aspirations and provides some insights into how cultural factors, such as norms, traditions, expectations, beliefs and cultural knowledge may eventually impact on the intergenerational capacity to fulfil these. In doing so, the study generates insights into how culture shapes a broad range of adolescent aspirations, and how ‘cultural capacities’ may later impact on adolescent educational decision-making.

Understanding worldviews, identity and ‘capacity’

One of the key findings in this study is that cultural worlds shape adolescent aspirations through the initial impact they have on worldviews. Cultural worlds shape what the girls believe is important in life and this shapes what the girls value and perceive to be valuable aspirations. The girls in this study value happiness, success, independence and having a balanced lifestyle. They value having opportunities, flexibility, control, security and comfort. Making a contribution and being recognised is important to them as is self-discovery and personal growth. The girls value these above all else in life and they therefore aspire for these, first and foremost.

It is how the girls’ define happiness, or envision themselves achieving their most valued goals that provides insights surrounding how the girls’ shared ‘surface level’ aspirations stem from their culturally shaped understandings. These were identified through the terminology the girls used such as, it is important to *‘have what you need’*, *‘do what means a lot to you’*, *‘have a good job’*, *‘have a career you love’*, *‘have enough money’*, *‘stand on your own two feet’*, *‘pay your own way’*, *‘do something big’*, *‘be different’*, *‘go far in life’*, *‘keep moving forward’*, *‘help’*, *‘give back’*, *‘make a difference’*, *‘play some small part in something’*, *‘do your own thing’*, *‘be your own boss’*, *‘be seen’*, *‘have someone’*, *‘share your experiences’*, *‘live comfortably’*, *‘be secure’*, *‘do many things’*, *‘get out there’*, *‘experience’*, *‘learn’* and *‘see’*. How these worldviews are attached to each particular ‘surface level’ aspiration has been detailed in the previous chapter. This thesis illustrates how the girls’ understandings about what is important in life shape their underlying affective aspirations, which then shape those aspirations on the surface. It demonstrates that

exploring worldviews enables for an understanding of adolescent aspirations, and the associated decision-making.

Another key finding in this study is that the girls' 'surface level' aspirations are shaped by exposure to the possibilities in their community, school and family worlds. Other females in the girls' family and school worlds are particularly influential as role models and individuals with whom they discuss future options. The girls' everyday experiences, including what they see and do, shapes what they know, what they can relate to, and what they can identify with as being valuable aspirations. The study illustrates that cultural worlds shape adolescent aspirations through the impact they have on exposure to 'what is normal' and 'what is possible'. The thesis demonstrates that the girls' various life aspirations stem from 'seeing' or 'knowing' about these, especially through other females in their school and family worlds. This thesis elucidates how exploring experiences within the socio-cultural context enables an understanding of how 'what is seen and known' shapes what adolescents identify with and aspire to.

As the majority of girls do not have a family tradition of higher education, and hence limited exposure to this possibility, the findings suggest that this aspiration is shaped mainly by their worldviews. The girls' university aspirations are connected to their overall worldview that 'anything is possible'. They are further connected to their shared understanding that university is needed to secure a career they will enjoy and that is fulfilling. This suggests that this shared understanding is transmitted largely through the mothers, and that university aspirations are shaped by this understanding, rather than exposure through experience.

A third key finding that responds to the research question is that the girls may face more challenges in fulfilling their aspirations for higher education, in comparison to students who have a family tradition of university participation. The study demonstrates that this holds true irrespective of socio-economic status, and illustrates that rurality also impacts on intergenerational 'cultural capacity'. The majority of the girls' parents and siblings have not completed years 11 and 12 of college, let alone university. Only two of the girls' mothers have completed university studies and Lucy is the only adolescent girl with older sisters who have completed university. Guided by recent research on the impacts of intergenerational family experiences of education

(see Bok, 2010; Smith, 2011), this finding suggests that successfully navigating the college system will be challenging, and navigating the university system will be even more challenging, for most of the girls in this study. This is based on the fact that the girls do not have the intergenerational family experience of higher education that existing research suggests will increase their ‘cultural capacity’ to do so (see Bok, 2010; Smith, 2011).

The life history portraits in Chapter Four highlight how the girls in this study have multiple aspirations and intentions, including those for college, university and professional level careers. The portraits demonstrate that the girls also have their own unique strengths and capabilities that may, or may not, increase their chances of fulfilling these. Despite the individual attributes, the multiple hopes and the optimism the girls have for education and careers, however, the portraits also suggest that they are faced with additional challenges directly related to the financial, emotional and psychological cost of leaving home for higher education. Considering the potential structural and emotional costs of leaving home for further schooling, in connection with a limited intergenerational experience of higher education; the findings suggest that the girls in this study will face more challenges than their urban counterparts when it comes to having the capacity to act on their higher education aspirations and intentions. This suggests that the aspirations are there, but the capacity to fulfil them may not be, and this is directly related to the interconnections between numerous factors within the rural setting, not individual factors such as lack of motivation.

Implications from the findings that may be of interest to education policy and practice are briefly outlined in the following section. Due to the highly qualitative and exploratory nature of this research project, these are ‘implications’, not recommendations.

Is ‘raising’ aspirations really the answer to widening participation?

This thesis demonstrates that rural girls have multiple aspirations, including those for higher education. This finding therefore brings into question recent participation in higher education policy that implies that students who are under-represented in higher education are lacking in aspiration (e.g. Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2009; Department of Education and

Skills, 2007; Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2009; National Assembly for Wales, 2001). These policy initiatives suggest that ‘raising aspirations’ will increase participation in higher education, especially in the case of students who are traditionally under-represented, including rural and regional students.

The thesis illustrates how the rural girls in this study have multiple aspirations, how these are interconnected and how they hope to fulfil all of them. The findings from this research demonstrate that the girls’ desires to have balance, and achieve as many of their aspirations as possible, impacts on participation in higher education, rather than low aspirations. The girls want balance in their lives, and it is questionable that they perceive fulfilling aspirations for higher education as immediately enabling this. The thesis illustrates that at this time in their lives, the girls are prioritising their aspirations for self-discovery and personal growth. It demonstrates that the girls see self-discovery as something that can be achieved through fulfilling their non-school related aspirations. This suggests that school may not be prioritised at a time when these girls have desires to engage in further ‘identity work’ (Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998). Another key finding that is illustrated in this thesis, is that although the girls have aspirations for higher education, the literature suggests that they do not have the type of ‘cultural capacity’ that is shaped by intergenerational family experiences of tertiary study. The findings further highlight that some structural and psychological factors associated with rurality and leaving home for tertiary education may impact on the opportunities that the girls may have to fulfil their aspirations for higher education.

Strategies and policy surrounding widening participation in higher education in rural areas may benefit from taking these findings into consideration. For instance, despite having ‘high’ aspirations, the rural girls in this study, may not go to university. This is largely related to their perceptions of what higher education enables them in terms of achieving balance and fulfilling their immediate desires to engage in ‘identity work’. The findings also suggest that the girls’ eventual decision-making may be influenced by their intergenerational ‘cultural capacity’ to engage in higher education and by the financial and emotional capacity they may, or may not have, to leave home for school. These insights raise questions about the effectiveness of strategies and policy that centre on ‘raising’ the aspirations of students from rural and remote locations. The

thesis illustrates that it is not the low aspirations of rural adolescents that policy makers should be concerned with, but rather the perceptions they have of higher education and the ‘cultural capacity’ they may, or may not have, to fulfil their university aspirations. As the benefits of ‘raising aspirations’ are questionable, the following section briefly discusses the potential benefits of ‘building capacity’.

‘Building capacity’

Existing research and theory demonstrates that ‘cultural capacity’ may be built through exposure to a range of social, economic and cultural experiences and to specific types of cultural knowledge (see Appadurai, 2004; Bok, 2010; Gale, 2010; Smith, 2011). This insight, and the findings from this study, suggest that exposure to a greater range of experiences will provide rural girls with more opportunities for ‘identity work’ and development of ‘the self’ (Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998; Phelan et al., 1991). ‘The self’ includes perceptions, feelings, understandings and the ability to adapt identity and worldview to different social settings (see Phelan et al., 1991, p. 228); it is something that is shaped in the socio-cultural context. It is therefore proposed that exposure to a broader range of social, economic and cultural experiences will extend students’ understandings of their ‘true and enduring self’ (see Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998), and so build their ‘cultural capacity’ to fulfil their aspirations (Gale, 2010).

To increase participation in higher education in rural areas, Gale (2010) proposes that it is necessary to expose young people to a broader range of social, cultural and economic experiences, or build on their ‘archive of experiences’. Gale (2010) argues that this strengthens the ‘cultural capacity’ to fulfil aspirations, by increasing knowledge and understanding of the possibilities, and how to pursue them. The findings from this research suggests that this is likely to be the case, and further, that exposure to a broader range of experiences may increase rural girls’ awareness of their interests, passions and capabilities. This is arguably another ‘cultural capacity’ that may impact on how aspirations are formed, prioritised and fulfilled.

This study illustrates that it is a desire to ‘experience’ more generally and discover ‘the self’ that may ultimately impact on rural young people’s decisions to participate in higher education. The findings suggest a need to provide rural adolescents with

more opportunities to engage in ‘identity work’ earlier in their high school years, as a means of building their capacity to better understand ‘the self’. Opportunities to engage in ‘identity work’ and further construction of the ‘enduring self’ allows students to gain a better understanding of who they are and who they are not; what their interests, passions and capabilities are; who and what they want to become or do not want to become; what they value and do not value; and, why they want whatever it is that they want. This enables students to better understand what is most important to them. It builds on their understanding of the full range of roles they can identify with and envision for their futures. This enhances their understanding of ‘the self’, which is constructed through experience (Hemmings, 2006; Hoffman, 1998).

Strategies designed to provide rural girls with greater opportunities to understand ‘the self’, may impact on higher education decision-making by influencing how aspirations are realised and prioritised. The girls in this study want to discover who they are, what they are passionate about, and what they are capable of achieving. Providing opportunities for them to do this earlier in their high school years, may influence how they prioritise their non-school-related aspirations for self-discovery, over those for higher education. The findings of this study illustrate that rural adolescent girls engage in ‘identity work’ and formulate their aspirations within particular cultural worlds. Therefore, strategies to widen participation in higher education need to focus on creating opportunities for ‘identity work’ and experiences that allow rural girls to ‘discover’ and ‘grow’, rather than on ‘raising’ their aspirations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: 'Questions sheet' for guided conversation

***The original document had additional space to allow for written responses**

1. Name:
2. Preferred name for this study (suggest a pseudonym):
3. How old are you? What grade are you in?
4. What subjects are you doing at school this year? (please include 'options')
5. What are your favourite subjects?
6. What kinds of things are you interested in?
7. What kinds of things do you enjoy doing after school? On weekends?
8. Are you involved in any community activities? Musical groups? Art or drama groups? Sports? Other?
9. Do you have friends that do these things with you outside of school hours or do you do them with others in your family or someone else?
10. Do you have any brothers or sisters? If yes, are you the oldest, in the middle, or the youngest? How old are your brothers/sisters? What kinds of things are they doing at the moment?
11. Do you work part-time? Do you enjoy this work?
12. What town do you live in? Have you always lived there? What kinds of things do you like about living where you live?
14. What is your favourite thing to do? Where is your favourite place to go to?

Appendix 2: Interview Two Schedule – Girls

1. If you could do anything, or be anything, that you wanted in the future, what would it be?

*Prompts:

- What are your hopes for the future? Your goals? Your aspirations?
 - What would you like to do?
 - What would you like to be?
2. What has given you the idea to want this/these?
 3. What do you like about this idea/these ideas?
 4. What are all your aspirations in life?

*Allow for conversation to flow, but prompt (for each aspiration) with:

- ‘What has given you the idea?’
- ‘What do you like about the idea?’
- ‘What has influenced this aspiration?’ and ‘How so?’
- ‘Who has influenced this aspiration?’ and ‘How so?’

*If necessary also ask specifically:

- What are your educational aspirations?
- What are your career aspirations?
- Do you have any aspirations for relationships?
- Do you have any aspirations for motherhood?
- Are there any other aspirations that you have for your life overall that you can think of?

5. What kinds of roles do you see yourself fulfilling in the future? Why?
6. What kinds of roles do you think others see you fulfilling in the future? Why?
7. What do you think others expect you to do in the future? (Including your parents, teachers, friends and family more generally) Why?
8. What kinds of things are important to you in life?

* Prompts:

- What do you value?
 - What do you believe in?
 - What kinds of things do you feel strongly about and care about?
 - What kinds of things matter to you?
9. Why are these things important to you?
 12. What ideas do you have about how to live life in general?

*Prompts:

- Have you heard people talk about living the good life? (discuss meaning)
 - If you were living 'the good life', what would you be doing?
 - If you were living 'the good life', what would you have?
 - Where do you think these ideas have come from?
13. In terms of your aspirations, which ones are the most important to you? Why?
 14. Do you know why you have prioritised your aspirations in this order?
 15. Can you describe any experiences that you have had that may have influenced what your aspirations are?
 16. Why or how do you think these have influenced you?

17. Are there any experiences within your peer group that may have influenced what you want to do in the future?
18. Do you know what types of things your friends are aspiring for? Do you know why?
19. Has this influenced what you are aspiring for? If yes, how so?
20. How much do you value what your friends think about what you are going to do? Why is that?
21. What do you think your friends expect you will do regarding your aspirations?
22. Are there any experiences in primary school or high school that may have influenced what you want to do in the future?

*Prompts:

- Any particular event or activity or learning experience? How were these influential?
 - Any teacher or other person? How was this influential? In what way?
 - What expectation do you think your teachers have of you?
23. Are there any experiences in the family that may have influenced your aspirations?

*Prompts:

- Are there any particular experiences that other family members have had that may have influenced your aspirations? (school, work, travel, relationships and lifestyle)
- Any traditions or norms?
- Any particular values or beliefs?
- What about family attitudes?

24. What kind of occupations and educational experiences have others in your family obtained or are aiming for? Do you think this has had any influence on you?
25. Are there any experiences that you have had in the wider community that have influenced what you want to do in the future?

*Prompts:

- Part-time work?
- Social activities?
- Leisure activities?
- Involvement in sport?
- People?

26. What do you think you will actually do when you are older?

*Prompts:

- What do you think is realistically going to happen for you?
- What is most likely to happen? What do you expect to happen?

27. Why do you think this is what you will actually do?

Finish the interview with a general conversation and arrange a 3rd interview.

Appendix 3: Interview Three Schedule – Girls

1. What do you believe is ‘the normal pathway’ for young people from this town to do after grade 10?
2. What about ‘the normal pathway’ in your family?
3. Do you think these ‘normal pathways’ have influenced what you want to do in the future? If yes, how so?
4. Do you think there is anything about living in this town that has influenced what you want to do in the future? If yes, how so?
5. How would you describe the culture of the community you live in?

*Prompts:

- The types of things that are normal or traditional?
 - What the community value the most in life?
 - What is expected by most people?
6. Do you think that being female has any particular influence on what you are wanting to do in the future? How so/why not?
 7. Do you think that others have certain expectations of you because you are female? Can you think of any examples you could give?
 8. Do you think that being female could be a barrier at all to you achieving your goals in life? How so/why not?
 9. Can you think of any barriers that may be in the way to you being able to fulfil your aspirations?

*Prompt:

- Is there anything that may stop you achieving your goals?

10. Will money be a barrier to you being able to go to college? What about university? What about achieving the other goals you have told me about?
11. Will distance or having to leave home be a barrier to being able to go to college? What about uni? Work? Anything else?
12. Will support, or lack of support, from people be a barrier to being able to go to college? What about uni? Work? Anything else?
13. What opportunities do you think are out there for you?

*Prompts:

- What is possible for you?
 - What are all the possibilities for you?
14. How would you describe yourself as a person? Who are you?

*Prompts:

- Personality characteristics/manner (e.g. outgoing, shy, quiet, calm, flighty, driven, laid back?)
 - Little things about you - your ways?
 - Things you find easy to do?
 - Things you find difficult to do?
 - Things you do well?
 - Things you don't do very well?
 - Interests (may have covered this with some girls)?
15. If I asked you how do you think someone else would describe you, what would you say? (So, your mother, father, sibling or friends)

16. Last time we met we talked about the things that are important to you in life. What I'm wondering is if you have a particular belief system? So, your own philosophies in life or things that you believe in that guide what you do?

*Prompts:

- This may be a motto?
- Or, a particular belief?
- Other ideas about what is important in life?

Finish the interview with a conversation about the research project and arrange to meet for member checking/review of transcripts and any final questions the participants may have for the researcher.

Appendix 4: Interview schedule – the mothers

1. What are your hopes for your daughter's future? What would you like her to do with her life? Why?

Prompts:

- Education?
 - Employment/career?
 - Sports/other interests?
 - Family/motherhood?
 - Travel?
 - Other lifestyle?
2. Did you have similar aspirations when you were younger to the hopes/expectations you have for your daughter now? If yes, why might your aspirations be similar? If no, why might they be different?
 3. Can you think of anything that may have influenced, or be influencing, what your daughter is aspiring for? How so?

Prompts:

- In the wider community, school and family?
- Peers/friends?
- School - teachers, other support staff, programs, experiences?
- Employers, coaches, others in wider community?
- Family members including older siblings, grandparents, other close family or friends?

4. How much of an influence do you think you are on your daughter's life and aspirations? Can you illustrate this influence with a particular anecdote/situation/story?

Prompts:

- Do you think your hopes for your daughter's future have influenced what she is aspiring for? How so?
 - Do you think there is anything about the relationship you have with your daughter that may be influencing her aspirations?
5. How much of an influence do you think others are on your daughter's life and aspirations? Can you illustrate this influence with a particular story?
 6. What were the expectations placed on you when you were your daughter's age? Who had these expectations of you?
 7. What kind of roles do you see your daughter fulfilling in the future?
 8. How similar or different are these roles from the ones you had at your daughter's age and that you have now? Why do you think these may be similar/different?
 9. Can you give some examples of the kinds of things you believe are important to you in life?

Prompts:

- What are your values?
 - What are your beliefs?
 - What do you feel strongly about?
 - What do you think is important in life?
10. Why are these things important to you?

11. Where do you believe that your daughter's values and beliefs about life stem from?
12. Is there anything you can think of that may be standing in the way of your daughter fulfilling her ambitions in life? How so?
13. Is there anything you can think of that may be helping your daughters chances of fulfilling her ambitions in life? How so?
14. Is there anything you would like to add or ask?

Finish the interview with a conversation about the research project and a thankyou for participation.

Appendix 5: Interview schedule – the school principals

1. How would you describe the wider community of which the school is a part?

Prompts:

- Is it a community with a lot of professional families?
 - Is it a community with a lot of tradespeople?
 - Is it a farming community? Mining community?
 - What is the community typically known for? Or seen to be like?
2. How would you describe the community in terms of its expectations of young people for things like employment, further education/training, relationships, motherhood and lifestyle?
 3. What kinds of mechanisms are in place in the local community to support young people generally?
 4. What level of community and parental support do you have at the school?

Prompts:

- Formally (through P&F, school association, etc.)
 - Informally (support for fundraising, excursions etc.)
5. What range of subjects are you able to offer at your school?

Prompts:

- Do you offer any year 11 & 12 subjects?
 - Do you offer VET courses?
6. Is the school involved in national projects like the National Values Project that ran a few years ago, or the Civics and Citizenship Program?

7. What types of programs do you offer at the school – outside of the regular curriculum?

Prompts:

- Do you offer driver training
- Parenting classes
- Music/sport/drama (outside of what is regularly taught)
- Breakfast club
- After school activities
- Excursions (and where to?)

8. What kinds of opportunities do students have at this school regarding considering their future? How do your students usually find out about education, training and career options?

Prompts:

- Is there a work placement program in the school?
- Is there a careers advisor?

9. Are there opportunities for exploring various educational, training, workplace options post-year 10?

Prompts:

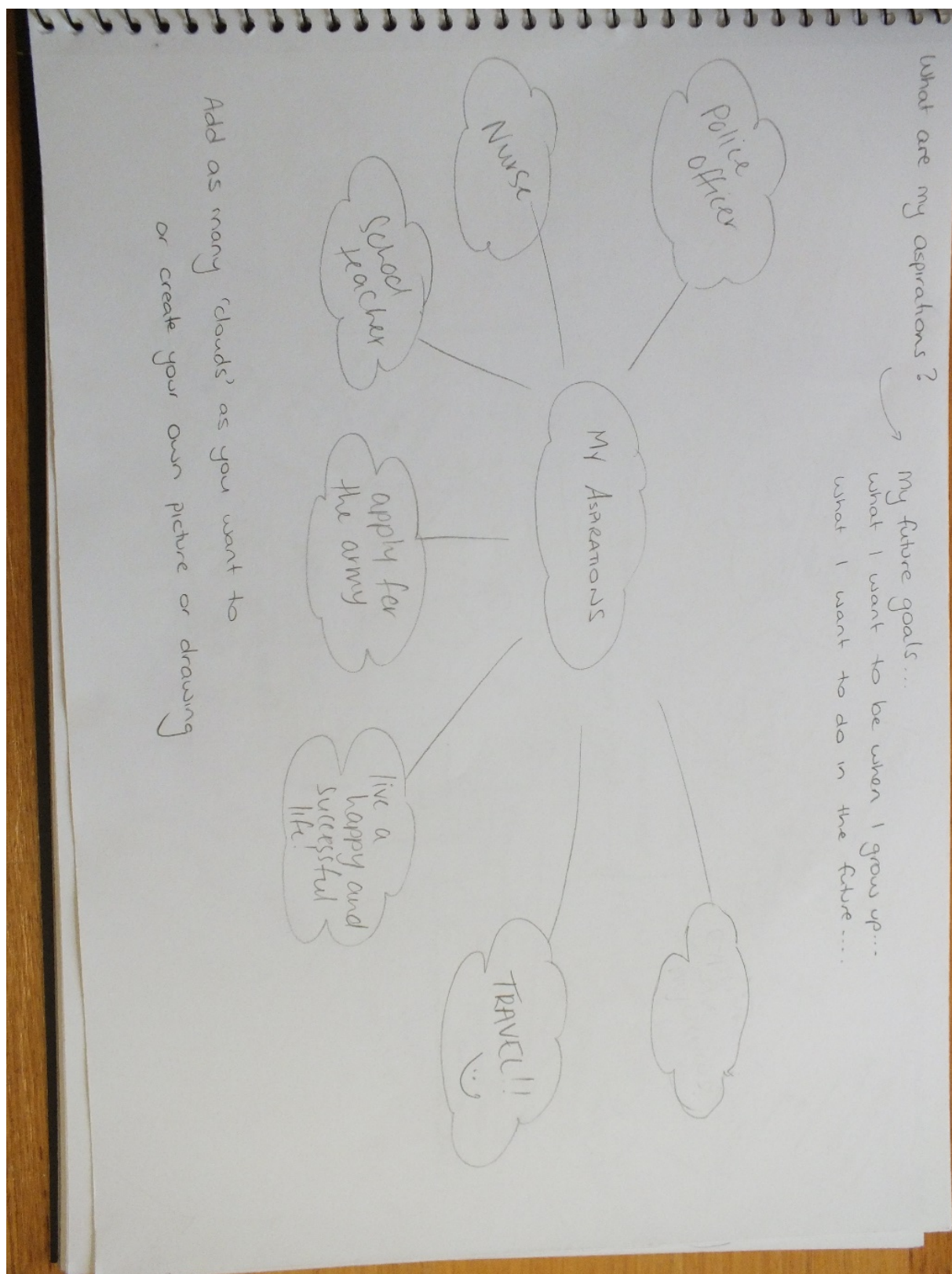
- Careers expo's?
- Careers camps?
- University visits?

10. How influential do you think conversations with teachers and support personnel are in shaping a girl's aspirations?
11. What about expectations – how influential are the expectations of teachers and others in shaping aspirations?
12. Do you believe that the experiences the girls have within your school play a part in shaping what they aspire to in life? How so? Can you provide any generalised examples or stories of this?
13. Do you believe that experiences the girls at your school have outside the school world influence what they aspire to in life? How so? Can you provide any generalised (Not for girls in this study) examples or stories of this? Peers, family, community?
14. What do you believe are some of the barriers that girls at your school may face regarding having the capacity to fulfil their ambitions? How so?
15. What do you believe are some of the things that help the girls at your school to fulfil their ambitions? How so?

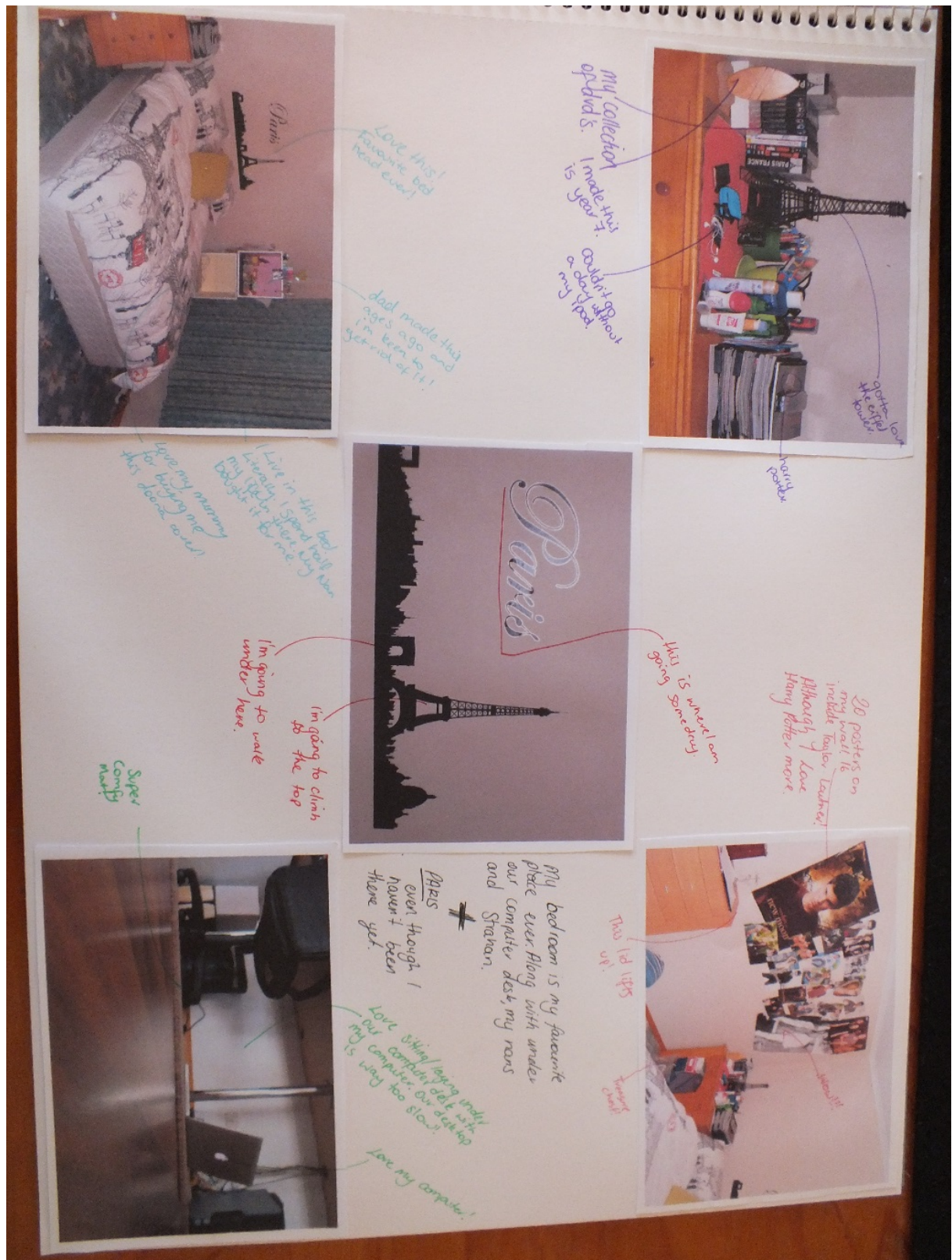
Is there anything you'd like to add, or to ask?

Finish the interview with a general conversation about the research and thankyou for participation.

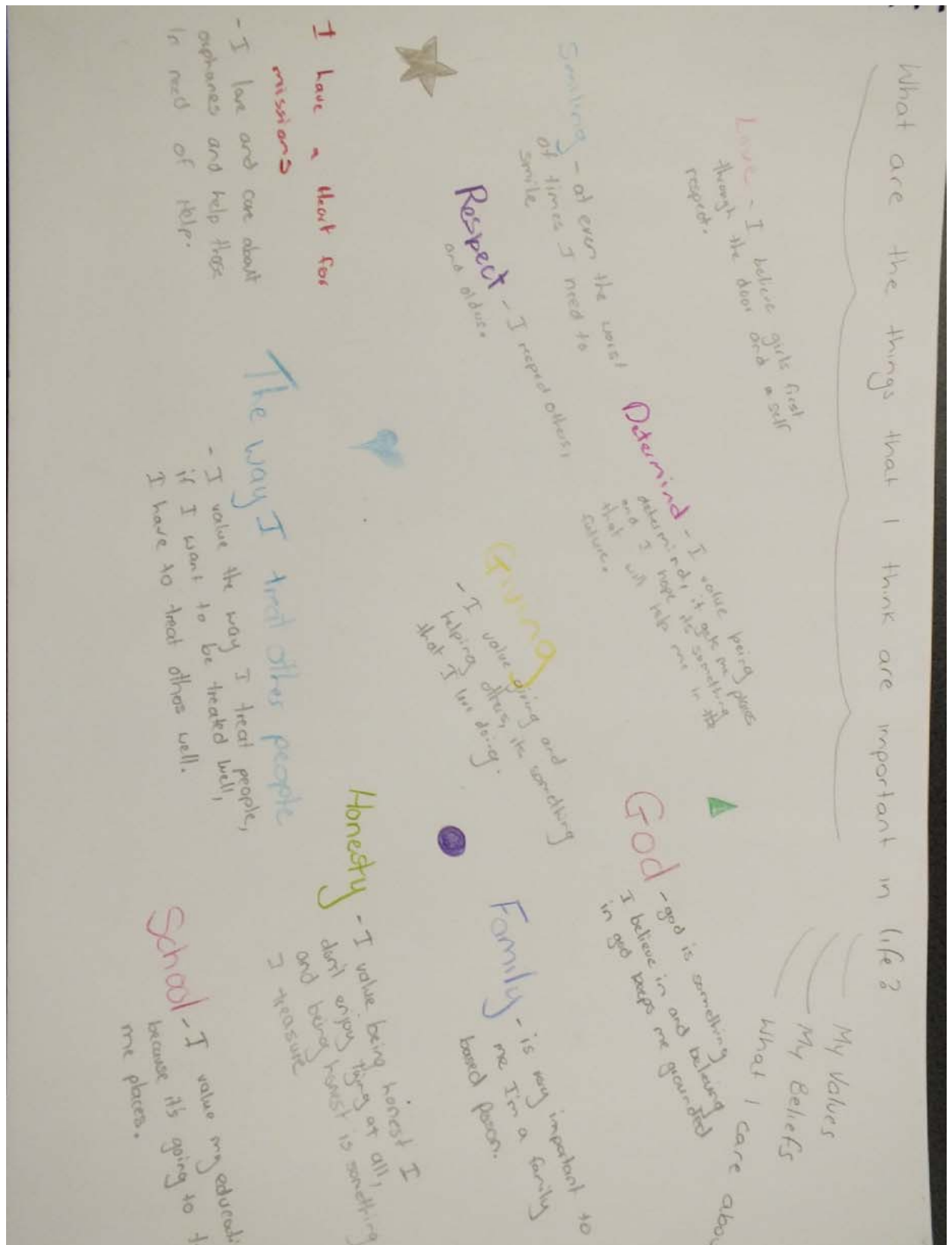
Appendix 6: 'Aspirations mind map' [Rose]



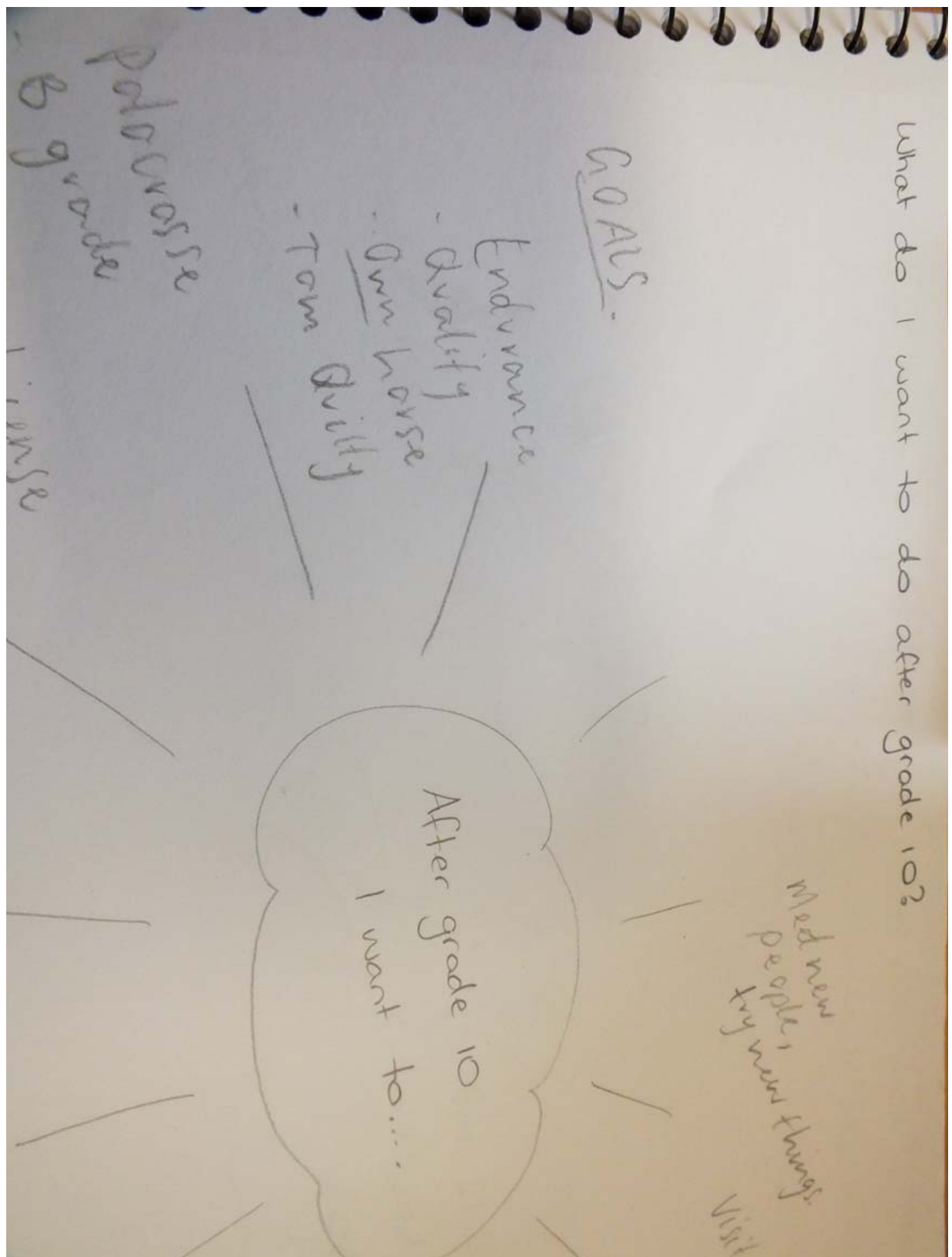
Appendix 7: ‘Travel collage’ [Taylor]



Appendix 8: 'Values mind map' [Ave]



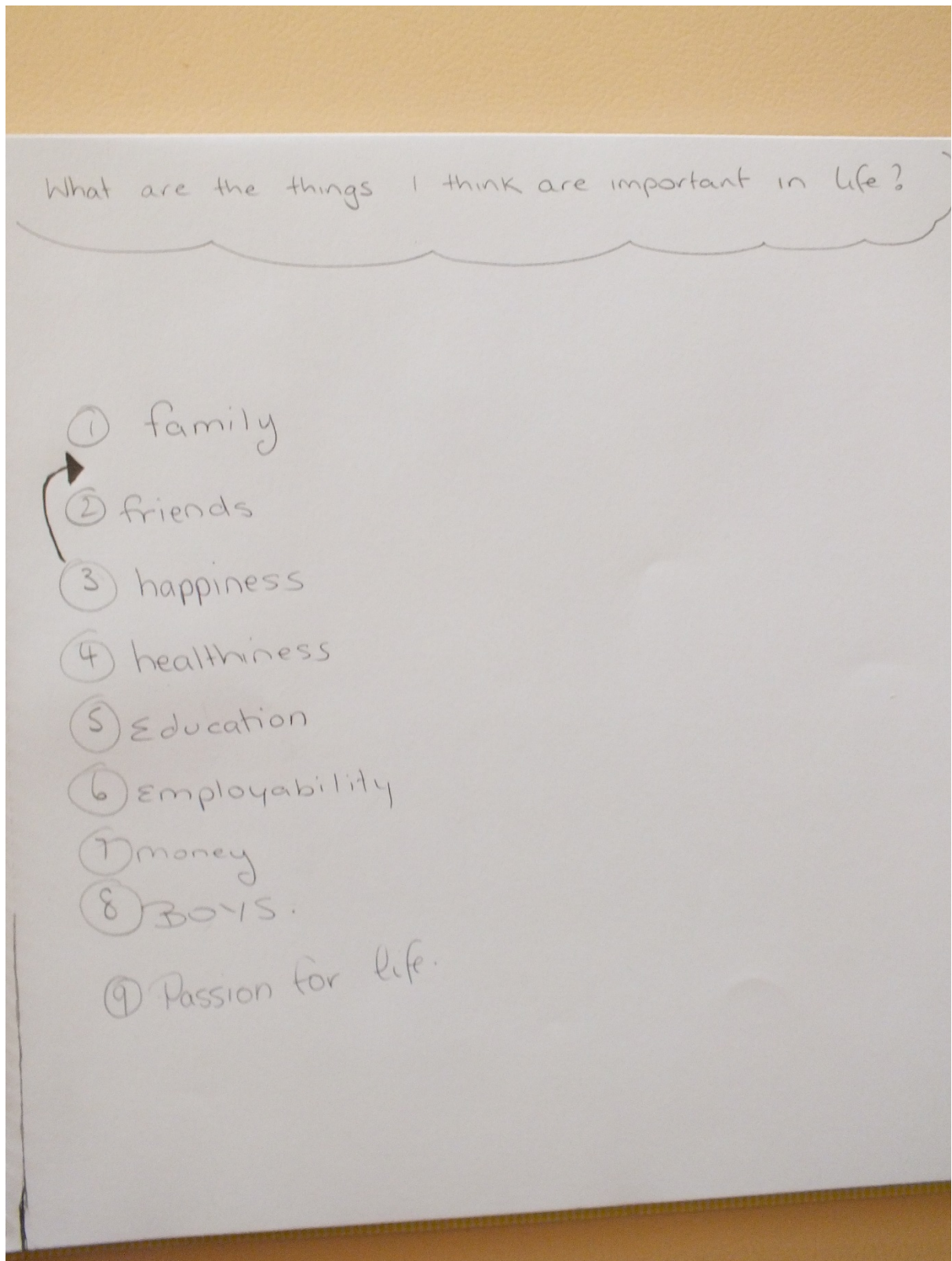
Appendix 9: 'After Grade 10 mind map' [Grace]



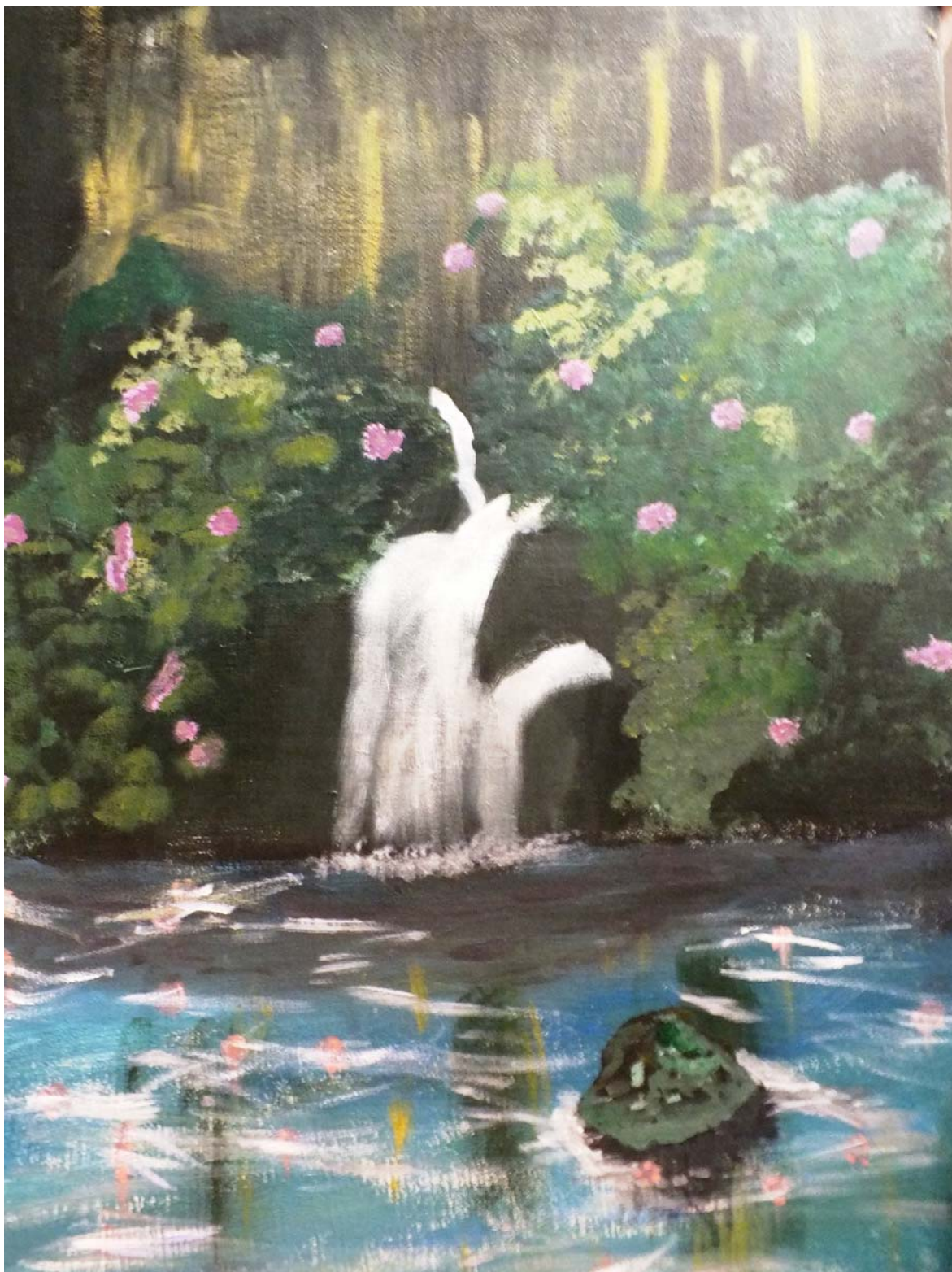
Appendix 10: ‘Army booklet’ [Ella]



Appendix 11: 'Values list' [Beth]



Appendix 12: 'Artist aspiration' [Cleo]



Appendix 13: 'Career plan' [LJ]

What are my options?
Think about the education, training, and work options available to you.

Push my self or choose a different career path.

What do I already know about my options?
Think about the details of your pathway option/s: the courses offered, the skills required, salary, work conditions and long term prospects.

Its all up to me

What do I need to know and how can I find out more?
Think about the things you need to find out about your pathway option/s before you can firm up your decision and the resources you can access to find out the information.

University options and courses.

Internet

WHAT ARE MY CHOICES?

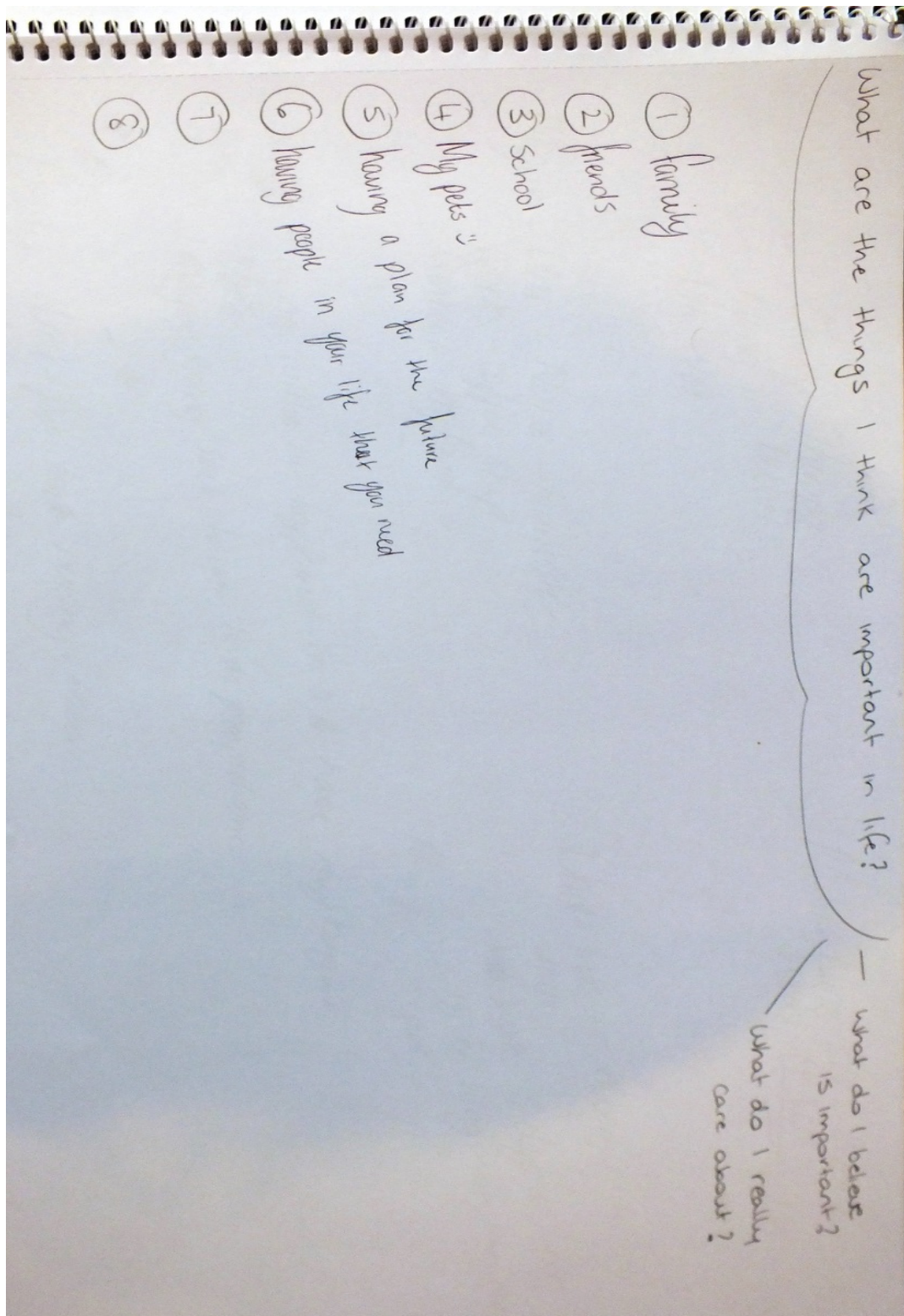
WHAT DO I ALREADY KNOW?

WHAT DO I NEED TO FIND OUT?

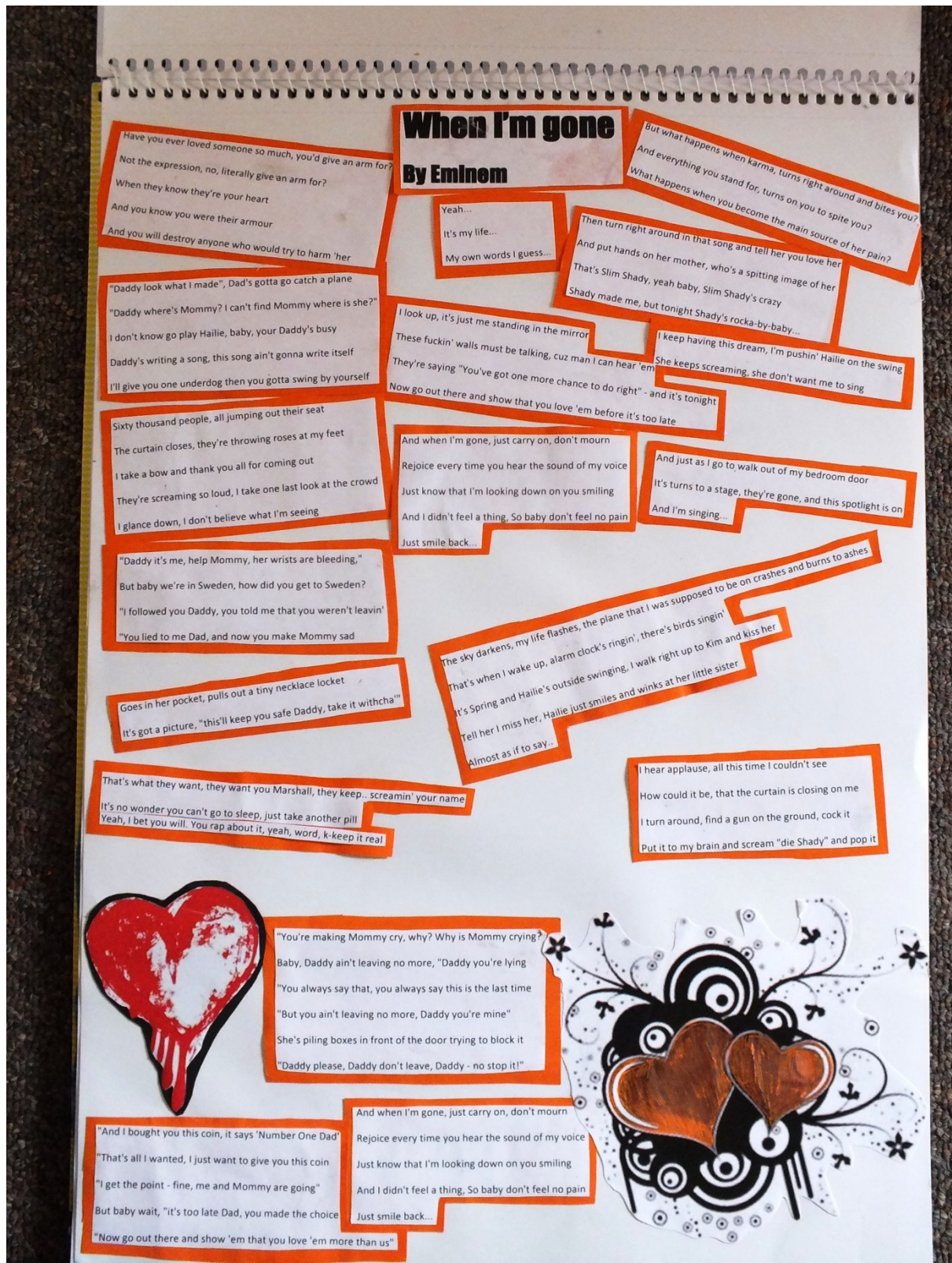
Knowing Yourself Exploring Options Making Decisions Taking Action

PATHWAY PLANNING

Appendix 14: 'Values list' [Lucy]



Appendix 15: 'Song collage' [Bianca]



Appendix 16: 'After Grade 12 mind map' [Lauren]

